とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）14
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
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Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 14

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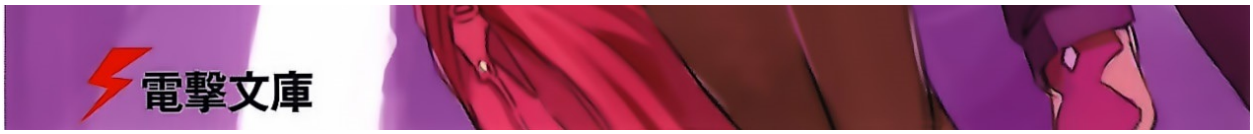

Toaru Majutsu no Index 14

October.

Suddenly, all around the world, anti-science demonstrations were started by the Roman Catholic Church. The very first of the science side to blame is none other than Academy City.

Whilst the world was in the midst of mayhem, Kamijou learnt that the main culprit behind this incident was the spiritual weapon called the "C-Document"; and together with Tsuchimikado, took off towards the tourist city of Avignon, France, which is considered as the place where the C-Document is located. At the actual place in Avignon, Kamijou met up with Itsuwa of the Amakusa Catholics. She was setting out to investigate the C-Document in her hands. But... standing in their way was Terra of the Left from God's Right Seat.

When science and magic cross paths, the story of Kamijou Touma shall begin——!

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とある魔術の禁書目録⑭

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Kamachi Kazuma

I wanted to tell the story of conflict of magic versus science, but since the population between the science and magic side in the story's setting is not balanced, I ended up failing to capture the feeling of two great powers clashing head on. I ended up contemplating about it for a while.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~14
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

As I liked exotic cuisine, I bought lots of spices, but all of them end up getting expired. It's mainly because I didn't have much free time to cook...

カバーノ無印刷

とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
14
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

"I was only going to shut these idiots up!!"
Kamijou's classmate — Fukiyose Seiri
"In short, the conclusion is that no matter what a loli wears, everything matches her. So it can be said that a loli would be the strongest as a bunny girl, nyaa!!"
Kamijou's classmate — Tsuchimikado Motoharu
"Darn you!! Can't you stop talking about bunny girls?!!"
High school student of Academy City (Level 0) — Kamijou Touma
"How... How is it that even you would be taking part in such a trivial argument...?
Mathematics teacher of Kamijou's high school — Oyafune Suama

“.....?”
Member of the Amakusa Church — Itsuwa

"It seems my turn has finally arrived. At any rate, we of God's Right Seat cannot use the ordinary magic that normal humans can use... But we would still like to thank you for providing us with this little bit of enjoyment."
Member of the Roman Catholic Church's "God's Right Seat" — Terra of the Left

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Prologue: An All-Too-Gloomy Church.
Bread_and_Wine.

Terra of the Left.

He was in St. Peter's Square, an elliptical plaza 240 meters in width, a water fountain stood a little to the side of its center. Terra was lying on his back against the fountain's edge, silently looking upon the starry sky.

In the sparsely-lit plaza, his face was unseen. Only his silhouette was wrapped up by the gentle darkness, and served as a kind of a veil.

A soft "glub" sound echoed.

It was not from the water fountain.

Held in Terra's right hand was a glass bottle containing cheap red wine. While neglecting the use of a drinking glass, every time he brought the bottle to his mouth, the alcohol within made waves along with a "glubbing" sound.

However, an alcoholic restlessness could not be felt from Terra's body.

If one plainly saw Terra's face during the day, he would have thought he saw a homely, alcohol-laden man, one not unlike a face from excessive overwork.

"Drinking again, Terra?"

The low voice of a man was heard.

Terra, still lying down on the water fountain's edge, turned his face towards the source.

Standing there was a fellow member of God's Right Seat, Acqua of the Back. A man clad in blue golfing wear.

Beside Terra was an old man dressed in magnificent vestments.

The Pope.

He should be the most powerful in the Vatican, but with two God's Right Seat members gathered, some mysterious presence was hiding among them.

As Terra wiped off the drooling red liquid from his lips with his arm,

"This is my replenishment for now— for the Blood of Christ."

"Bread and wine. The structure for a mass."

"My angel, Raphael, represents earth, so partaking in the earth's harvests and blessings to replenish my strength is quick and easy."

Though meant to be a serious response, both Acqua and the Pontiff sighed. Their glances fell upon Terra's feet.

There were emptied bottles scattered about.

Looking at the labels stuck on the bottles, Acqua said as he shook his head,

"Cheap wine. Not even worth considering in tourist rip-off stores. For you to use the name of God's Right Seat, you should be collecting better brands."

"Please stop it. I can't understand the flavors of those alcohols. Those are mere tools for ceremonial use and talking about luxuries is impolite to a true drunkard."

Hearing Acqua and Terra's exchange, the Pontiff interjected.

"...As a shepherd for the followers, I wish you to refrain from blatant drinking."

"Oh, dear me, getting reprimanded is rare."

As Acqua laughed in a low voice.

"For my part, I was bound by necessity as part of the service; but then it seems someone knows quite a bit about alcohol brands and flavor for a person not bound like me, right Acqua—?"

Glared at by the Pontiff, Acqua fell back a bit.

Unlike the other members, for some reason, only he did not ignore the Holy Father.

"A corrupt mercenary's tastes... That, too, is necessary in the battlefield."

"Ha ha, so Acqua's a hoodlum eh—. I can now say that we're the bad kids different from the pious believers."

The Pontiff grimaced at Terra's light-hearted comment.

He was likely wishing that he need not work with these ilk.

And then the Pontiff surveyed the great plaza that could hold 300,000 people,

"But then, I, the Pope, and you two of God's Right Seat are gathered out in the open without a decent guard."

"Perhaps we should head inside for our meeting. The guards would have frothed mouths if they saw what we were doing."

"We're alright here. The spiritual binding effects of the Croce di Pietro still hold." As Terra drank on the wine, he looked up at the night sky,

"The unpleasant skies are spreading out. Countless barriers colliding and conflicting as they float like auroras. Magically shooting through these barriers will be difficult."

From the start, if one not bound by limits could unravel the system of every magic, calculating workarounds and countermeasures was possible. That compilation was the grimoire collection Index Librorum Prohibitorum that the Anglican Church was so proud of. It too was important on the battlefield.

However, as a result of the multiple barriers protecting the entire country in a complicated union with over ninety percent of the Vatican's structures possessing Christian significance, only Index could analyze them; not even the supreme leader the Pontiff could fully understand them.

Even if they spent a long time cracking the complicated codes, if the patterns in

the passwords changed every second, the old solution would completely lose its significance. Far from keyhole-shaped, even the numbers change, so master keys could not be made.

Because it was impossible for anyone, including the Pontiff, to exhibit clear control over them, the multiple barriers surrounding the Vatican had so far rejected all types of analytical magic.

"Well then,"

Terra said.

He placed the emptied wine bottle on the fountain's edge.

The cheap wine he brought into sacred ground was, for now, finished.

Terra slowly arose and he lightly stretched his back,

"The replenishment for the Blood of Christ is over; it is nearly time for me to go-
"

Upon hearing those words, Acqua slightly raised his eyebrows.

"You're going to use that?"

Terra lightly smiled.

He likely understood it from the tone. Feelings of distress rose within Acqua.

"You're complaining about using civilians eh, Acqua?"

"If it's killing one another, it is better to leave it to soldiers enduring on subsistence."

"Haha, an aristocratic opinion. However..."

Terra pleasantly widened his smile.

"...for us, the Roman Catholic Church, numbers are our greatest strength. 2 billion is a huge advantage. To be especially unwilling to use this is unnatural. Academy City's total population is 2.3 million. Surely a literal difference in

numbers, in this case."

"War is decided by the quantity of goods and people, eh? How uncivilized. It feels like I am witnessing ancient warfare here."

"It's really the simple answer. It is something that has remained unchanged since antiquity—"

Terra, looking up at the barrier-covered night sky, said so. He should have been drunk on alcohol but his manner had not changed at all.

"We, God's Right Seat, are imperfect, but through this mystique we lead the people."

He widely spread both his arms, stood on one foot, and quickly turned around towards Acqua,

"And with that, let us lead the frightened lambs as we please. I am the shepherd... they will be like the children who disappeared while enthralled by the flute."

Chapter 1: A Too-Quick Rate of Change.
In_a_Long_Distance_Country.

Part 1

District 3 of Academy City contained a number of international exhibition halls.

There was a direct railroad line leading there from the city's entrance from other countries, District 23. There were plenty of facilities for foreigners in the district and the grade of the hotels there was the highest in all of Academy City. The guest facilities were placed so far from the airport-centric District 23 so the guests would not have to worry about the noise of the planes.

There were always multiple events being held in District 3.

There was a motor show containing the best of automobile tech, a robot show showing off pieces of pure mechanical engineering, and many others. These exhibitions were not just for fun; their main purpose was to promote the latest tech from Academy City, technology that the board of directors had deemed of an acceptable level to be used outside the city. These were placed on display and the outside company that gave the best deal was chosen (Academy City did not "look for" them, they merely "chose"), and that company would pay them vast quantities for the tech.

And on that day, there was one specific show being held.

The various technologies on display were unmanned attack helicopters, the latest powered suits, an ultra-violet ray sniping device that was a high-output optical weapon that used a certain type of light wave to injure, kill and even be used for aerial bombings. The event was being called the "Interceptor Show", so nothing

too dangerous could be on display.

“Phhaa.”

A deep breath was heard.

It belonged to Yomikawa Aiho, who was removing the helmet of the powered suit that she was in, around the corner of the dome-shaped international exhibition hall. She usually wore an unfashionable jersey over her body that made her stand out and bother young men, but she looked oddly humorous wearing the bulky powered suit.

“It’s so hot… Why is demonstrating a powered suit so exhausting?”

Yomikawa looked fed up with what she was doing as she held the helmet in her arms and glanced at the woman in work clothes next to her. That woman was part of the powered suit development team, so she normally wore a white lab coat. Because of this, the work clothes looked as out of place on her as the clothes on children at the Shichi-Go-San festival.

“Don’t worry. It isn’t just you. The entire exhibition hall is oddly hot.”

On her lap, the woman engineer had a laptop with a card that looked like a thin cell phone stuck in the side. The screen of the laptop showed the details of the powered suit.

“That doesn’t really make me feel any better.”

“I didn’t say it to make you feel better.”

“By the way, why are there so many damn people at a show like this on a weekday? Isn’t this exhibition hall over capacity?”

“Today’s a business day, so there really aren’t that many people here. Tomorrow, it’s open to the public, so it’ll be complete hell.”

“That really doesn’t make me feel any better!”

“I didn’t say it to make you feel better.”

Yomikawa was disheartened by the engineer's words and placed the helmet on the ground.

The helmet was almost 50cm (20in) wide. It looked like you could put it over the top of the drum-shaped robots that wandered around Academy City. The rest of the powered suit looked more like a slightly thicker version of a Western suit of armor, which led to the head looking huge.

"Ahh. I think I'm just going to take the whole thing off."

As she said this, Yomikawa began to slide out through the now-helmetless neck of the suit. Inside the powered suit, she was wearing a black outfit similar to what special forces wear.

She sat down leaning against the motionless powered suit and fanned her face with her hand.

"Really, why do we have to wear an armored outfit inside of these things? Can't you people make a special outfit for operating a powered suit that's a bit more breathable?"

"Well, you should have gone along with the project head's suggestion that you come out of the powered suit in a sexy bikini. You would have gotten quite a round of applause from the press then."

The monotonous voice the engineer said this in made it sound like she really didn't care.

Yomikawa wiped the sweat off of her face with a towel.

"By the way, why did that project head seem so excited while talking about having a woman present the suit?"

"He has a thing for women doing things like that. The poor thing."

"And why did he think someone like me would do that? I'm about the most unrefined woman in Japan. Someone made a huge mistake choosing me."

"It must be tough being in Anti-Skill. You get stuck with more odd jobs than a member of the JSDF."

“We only get stuck with doing things like this when there’s nothing else to do. So doing something like this really shows how peaceful things are.”

Yomikawa stopped speaking and looked around.

All of the booths around her were displaying various tools used to kill people.

Previously, all of the weapons displayed at these shows had a hint of having been created to stop a rampaging esper while doing as little damage as possible. But this time there was a tank and, next to it, a powerful weapon that could shoot straight through said tank and kill someone behind it.

(I can only think of one thing that could explain this sudden change in focus…)

Yomikawa glanced over at the laptop the engineer was using. Not only did it show the powered suit data from when Yomikawa had been doing the demonstration, but there was a small window showing a television broadcast.

It was a news program and the announcer was reading the current news.

“It is currently just before dawn in southern France, where a large-scale religious protest has broken out in the industrial city of Toulouse. People have filled up several kilometers of a road running alongside the River Garonne, which runs through the center of the city. The currently blocked traffic is having a major effect on the infrastructure of the city.”

The recorded footage showed the dark city lit by the fires of torches as a great number of people were marching around. Men and women could be seen holding banners with angry statements written in French and youths were setting fire to Academy City posters.

They were taking part in a protest; they weren’t an out-of-control mob. Even so, the sight of tens of thousands of angry people marching was an intimidating one.

“Their actions are centered on an area where many Japanese car companies are located. This is presumably a demonstration against Academy City. About 80% of the French are said to be Roman Catholic, so the same thing is being seen in cities across the country.”

Even so, it could easily be worse.

As Yomikawa watched the screen, the news from that morning played again.

“In the central German city of Dortmund, a bulldozer thought to have been stolen was plowed into a Roman Catholic Church and 9 priests inside were wounded. It is thought to have been in response to the series of protests being held, but so far no one has come forward claiming to be behind the crime. Fears that the conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and Academy City will worsen are spreading.”

She had already seen this news, but it still bothered her.

It was like a small spark spreading to a pile of straw. The movement of the world had greatly changed in the last few days. The demonstrations being carried out by the Roman Catholic Church around the world and the various overreactions to them were picking up pace.

And, almost as if it were in response to all this, Academy City was now holding this show full of weaponry.

At first glance, it could be taken as the board of directors officially saying that they wouldn’t be giving in to the demonstrations.

(But it’s all being carried out a bit too efficiently.)

Developing weapons was not the same thing as making plastic models. You had to apply for the job, calculate an estimated budget again and again, have it examined, create a test model, build each part, and go through simulations tens of thousands of times. It was only after you found good results, that you could finally release a “product”.

The demonstrations had only begun to worsen a few days ago.

That wasn’t enough time to go through a development process that was usually counted in years.

Which meant…

(Academy City was already prepared. They had predicted this would happen and decided to prepare to take control of the aftermath instead of stopping it from happening in the first place.)

“Damn it,” Yomikawa muttered.

It may not have been Academy City that pulled the trigger that led to war. But they were clearly making the absolute best of the situation.

The woman engineer whom the laptop belonged to wiped the sweat from her brow using her shirt sleeve and looked uninterestedly towards the news on the screen.

“It’s the same thing on every channel. It’s times like this that I wish I’d subscribed to some channels that only aired variety shows.”

“…What do you think about this situation?”

“Well…”

The weapons development researcher engineer took a deep breath.

“I don’t like having more work. And having to put in unpaid overtime is even worse.”

“Is this exhibition really that different than usual?”

“Yeah, the project head is really enthusiastic about this one. He said something about needing to overthrow the idea that being a military contractor is horrible so that we can have a whole new market to work in. He also went on about how it's a great time to be a weapons developer. The project head was getting so worked up that I chucked some ice at him to try and cool him down.”

“The tech on display here is clearly not here to sell to outside companies. So this must really be a kind of military exercise. We’re really just showing off our destructive weapons to the ‘enemy’ as a diplomatic tool.”

“The companies we’re trying to work out a deal with aren’t going to get the things here as is. Just like how rifles are sold in stores with the full-auto function taken out, these will be sold after reduced by 3 or 4 tiers. The weapons end up just barely creatable by the technology outside Academy City .”

Yomikawa glanced at some men in business suits chatting a bit ways away next to a stage.

“Also, licenses to create the core parts of the weapons are being sold to organizations that work with Academy City in various countries. They just have to inform us of how many they’re making and where they’re being deployed. Honestly, why is Academy City going this far to gather money?”

“With enough funds, we could mass produce some pretty ridiculous weapons. The project head was saying something about a giant robot that could fly through space. He'll probably choose a teenage boy to pilot it.”

“…You don’t sound all that motivated.”

“Not at all.”

Part 2

Yomikawa Aiho had no way of knowing, but at the center of this large conflict was a single boy.

Kamijou Touma.

Other than his special power, Imagine Breaker, he was a normal high school student. But if what God’s Right Seat said was correct, he had made an enemy of 2 billion people. When he thought of the things he had gotten involved in in the past few months and how he had resolved them little by little, it wasn’t really all that surprising.

But where was Kamijou Touma, the boy at the center of that conflict, now?

“Can you explain to me why you did what you did?”

He was being scolded by a tall female teacher in the staff room.

Actually, Kamijou was not the only person being scolded. Aogami Pierce and Tsuchimikado Motoharu were lined up next to him.

And behind those three stood Fukiyose Seiri whose angry face seemed to be asking why she was there too.

The staff room was full of steel office desks cluttered with various objects. It was the lunch break, so there were plenty of teachers there. Some were eating their bentos, some were grading tests, and some were sitting on electronic moving rocking horses that were supposed to help lower ones weight.

Among them, one teacher was doing none of these things. Oyafune Suama was instead sitting on a cheap swivel chair crossing her legs covered in beige stockings, combing her black hair that looked as hard as metal, and glared at Kamijou and the others with sharp eyes through her inverted triangle glasses that were probably some expensive brand.

“I’ll ask you again to explain to me why you were having a fight full of fists and burning souls in this place of learning.”

She was met with silence.

The news announcer could be heard from the TV on the wall.

“As a result of the repeated demonstrations and protests, the Italian soccer league has announced that this morning’s game has been cancelled for safety’s sake.”

“You can’t explain it?”

That upset math teacher who was wearing nothing but brand-name clothing was well-known in the school for being strict when it came to discipline. Kamijou’s class didn’t take any classes from her, so they hadn’t really crossed paths before, but she had caught them today.

The head teacher of Kamijou’s class was Tsukuyomi Komoe, but not even she could keep track of what was going on in the classroom during the lunch break. Oyafune Suama had been walking by when they were in the middle of a fight and dragged them to the staff room.

After a bit, Kamijou, one of the three idiots, started speaking.

“But…”

His gaze was set with resolve.

“But Aogami Pierce and I were arguing over whether red bunny girls or black bunny girls were better. And then Tsuchimikado comes in and starts saying some ridiculous crap about white bunnies being the best ones!!”

Suama fell right out of her chair with a loud crash.

The loud noise shocked Kamijou, but it seemed his comment had shocked the teacher with the educator’s glasses even more.

The math teacher moved her gaze from the three idiots to Fukiyose Seiri standing behind them.

“D-don’t tell me you were taking part in that silly argument as well.”

“I was just trying to get these idiots to shut up!! Why did I have to be dragged down here along with them!?”

The blood vessels on Fukiyose’s temple bulged out as she yelled.

When Oyafune had stepped into Kamijou’s class, Fukiyose had been holding Tsuchimikado in a headlock, kicking Aogami Pierce to the ground, and hitting Kamijou Touma with her hard forehead all at the same time. She had clearly been the biggest bully at the scene.

Meanwhile, Tsuchimikado who was wearing blue sunglasses turned to both sides and cried out.

“Nyah! Hooray for DFC white bunnies!”

Aogami Pierce couldn’t keep silent after hearing that.

“Why is it always flat chests with you!? And you don’t really like bunnies at all! You’re just fine with anything loli!!”

“That’s true, Aogami Pierce. Be it a bunny girl outfit, a gymnastics leotard, or a

school swimsuit, when put on the wonder that is a loli, the small distinctions between outfits are moot. So my argument is that lolis look good in whatever they wear, so a loli bunny girl is the best bunny girl!!”

“You bastard!! So you really weren’t talking about bunny girls at all!!”

The three idiots started rolling up their sleeves for a second round when Oyafune Suama who was still lying on the ground wearing her glasses and a formal suit pulled a whistle from her pocket.

Tweeet!! A high-pitched noise rang out and Saigo-sensei, a gorilla-like educational guidance teacher, came lumbering towards them from the back of the staff room.

Part 3

In the end, Kamijou and the others were forced to do some weeding behind the gym.

It was a damp area that the sun never really reached, but the weeds seemed to grow there quite well. One glance at the huge amount of green weeds and he lost all motivation for the job. It felt like there was no need to make the area look nice because no one ever went there.

But there was something else that kept his motivation down even more.

“Damn it. Tsuchimikado and Aogami Pierce have disappeared.”

Only two of the four ordered to do the weeding were standing out there: Kamijou and Fukiyose.

As he looked at the area stretching out behind the gym, Kamijou's shoulders drooped. Beyond the thin gym wall, he could hear the energetic and happy voices of the volleyball team and basketball team enjoying their afterschool activities. That only made the mental shackles of the harsh job seem even heavier.

And yet complaining about Tsuchimikado and Aogami Pierce disappearing wasn't going to get rid of those weeds.

Kamijou got a wheelbarrow to transport the weeds to the dumping area and put on some work gloves.

"Y'know, it'll be past the time we're allowed in the school before we're done with this. We might as well weed at a leisurely pace until they kick us out."

"If only we could get a Pyrokineticist to help out. We'd be done in no time," Kamijou further complained.

Fukiyose complained about being punished along with the others as she pulled weeds up more efficiently than Kamijou.

When Kamijou got tired of weeding after about 5 minutes, he tried striking up a conversation with Fukiyose who was bent over working a bit away.

"Hey, Fukiyose."

"What?"

Fukiyose must have been bored too, because she quickly joined the conversation.

Kamijou spoke as he continued working.

"The October midterms have been called off, but you're still spending all of your free time studying on your own. Why?"

"What kind of question is that?" Fukiyose responded. "With no midterms, our second term grades are going to be riding on the final exam. And the material on the exam is going to be twice what it would have been otherwise. That means we need to be working even harder."

“…”

“And before you ask: I won’t let you see my notes.”

Kamijou had been ecstatic that they weren’t going to be having midterms, so Fukiyose’s indifferent attitude was like salt to the wound.

Upon receiving this unexpected damage, Kamijou went into contrary mode.

“H-hmph. Academics aren’t everything, you know?”

“You make it sound like I can’t do anything except academics.”

“…Oh, you can do other things?”

“Of course I can!!” Fukiyose yelled from deep in her gut. “I may not look athletic, but I can throw a forkball. I don’t really care about baseball, though!!”

“Eh?”

Kamijou let out a stupid noise.

“You probably just learned it through a correspondence course or know some way forkballs keep you healthy or something.”

“I-it doesn’t matter how I learned it; it only matters whether I can throw one or not! So quit looking at me like you don’t believe me and I’ll show you!!”

“Yeah, but we don’t have a ball.”

Kamijou had said that out of surprise, but then Fukiyose Seiri pulled a large ball out of her skirt pocket.

“You need to be more prepared!!”

“…Um, that ball says 'squeeze this ball 100 times a day to provide yourself with healthy α-waves' on it.”

Kamijou was just in complete shock, but Fukiyose didn’t seem to mind. She seemed pretty fired up over this and was scraping her feet on the ground to smooth it out.

They now had a ball, but they had no catcher’s mitt. However, Kamijou didn’t seem to have much of a choice, so he put on several layers of work gloves and squatted down a distance from Fukiyose like he’d seen catchers do.

Kamijou spoke in monotone almost like he was sighing as he spoke.

“Okay, go ahead, Fukiyose.”

“Okay, Kamijou. Watch this 150 kph strong fast one and don’t fall down!!”

“A 150 kph forkball!? I’m about to fall over from shock at that bluff!!”

Kamijou was flustered.

Fukiyose seemed to be really into it as she gripped the white ball and moved her body into position.

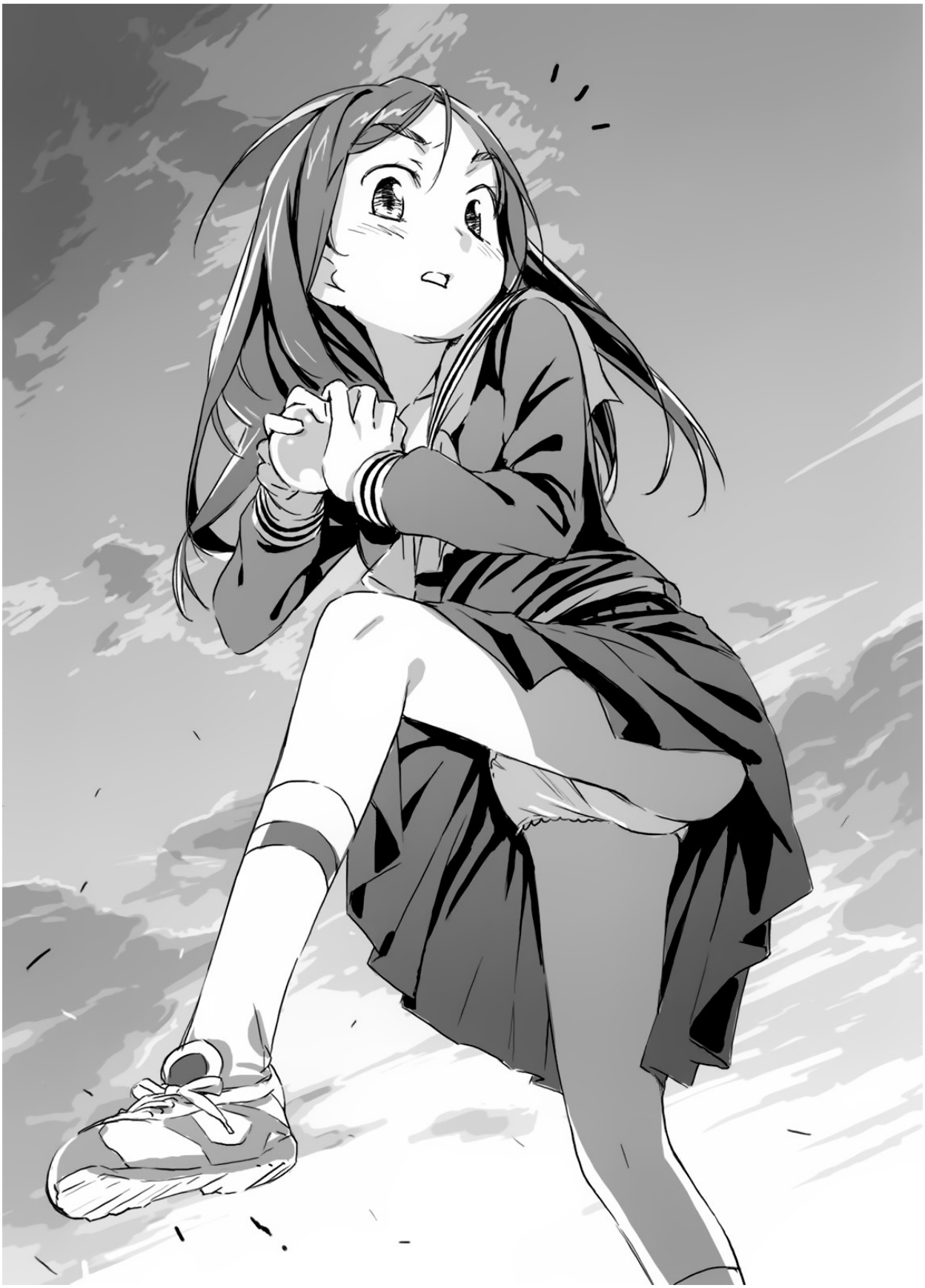
She was building up her power when Kamijou yelled out.

“S-st-stop, Fukiyose!!”

“What!?”

Fukiyose yelled while wobbling in her interrupted pitching form.

Kamijou was hesitant to explain the situation, so he gave only the core of the information.



“Your skirt!!”

“…?”

Fukiyose looked confused at this comment and then she noticed where Kamijou was looking. When she looked down at her hips, she saw that the leg she was holding up was flipping up her short skirt making her panties with a cute design visible.

Fukiyose Seiri threw her strong fast pitch.

Kamijou screwed up his timing and the soft rubber ball hit him straight in the gut. It made a very loud noise.

As he writhed in pain, he spoke in a shaky voice.

“…Th-that was no forkball. It flew in a completely straight line…”

“That one didn’t count!!”

Fukiyose declared that with a little too much force in an attempt to fool him and took the ball back.

“It’ll be a forkball this time. It’ll jerk down, so hold the mitt down low.”

She went back into pitching form, but she must have taken heed of Kamijou’s warning about her skirt because she kept the movement of her legs to a minimum.

That may have been why her body was wobbling a little off balance. Even so, she managed to give the ball incredible power. It slammed into Kamijou’s glove-covered hand with a loud noise. His hand stung afterwards even though they were using a toy ball instead of a proper hardball. Also, Fukiyose wasn’t throwing underhand like a softball player; she was throwing overhand like a professional baseball player. And quite well, too.

Kamijou softly squeezed the ball he had caught.

“…Did that fall?”

“Yes!! What were you looking at it? Couldn’t you see it jerk down right in front of where the batter would be!?”

“Ehh? It looked like a normal pitch to me.”

“K-Kamijou!! You can’t tell because you’re not looking from the batter’s perspective!! If you were holding a bat, you’d be able to see the effect of the forkball clear as day!!”

“Oh? Now you’ve said it, Fukiyose.”

Kamijou smiled and grabbed the 50 cm long plastic handle of a small broom that they had prepared just in case.

“You’re on.”

He gripped the broom kind of like a baseball bat and swung the end with flicks of his wrist as if he was measuring its timing.

Meanwhile, Fukiyose caught the ball Kamijou lightly threw to her and a daring grin appeared on her lips.

“You think you can hit a ball thrown by a major-leaguer like me? Ridiculous.”

“I’ll hit a homerun.”

“Then I’ll have to let you feel the disgrace of losing to a true forkbaaaaall!!”

“It’s goin’ outta the paaaarrrkkk!!”

She threw the white ball.

It flew through the air.

If he waited to see whether the ball would fall or not, it would be too late to hit it.

As he was measuring her true intentions and her true skill, he began to move.

Power and tension ran throughout his body.

He calculated his timing, gave a short breath, gathered strength in his legs, swung his hips in unison with the movements of his legs, and swung the broom in his hands as hard as he could.

And…

Part 4

From her suit and glasses to her stockings, Oyafune Suama was covered in brand-name clothing. She was a woman that knew the advantages that being beautiful gave.

She primarily knew this because she used to be the person who was at the disadvantage for not being beautiful.

But anyone could reach a certain level of beauty if they tried. Suama's theory was that you may not be able to be "the best of the best" or even "among the best" through hard work alone, but you could at least be "better than most". And as "better than most", you could get a taste of the blessings of beauty.

It was advantageous to be beautiful.

The students listened to her during class, the other teachers didn't look down on her, and people gave up their seat for her in the cafeteria. And all of that was the result of refining her body inside and out by taking multiple baths a day, putting lotion on her face before going to bed, eating breakfast every day, keeping her weight down so it didn't affect her skin, spending over an hour in the morning putting makeup on, and spending large amounts of money buying Western clothes from magazines and the internet.

When school came to an end, Oyafune Suama was always very worried that her

makeup might have started to come off and especially that her drawn on eyebrows might have started to run from sweat. But one's attitude and mood were an important part of being "beautiful". If she showed outward signs of being worried about her makeup, the "blessings of beauty" would diminish, so she couldn't be constantly checking her hand-mirror or going to the bathroom.

(…)

Suama slowly looked around.

She was in the staff room. By this time, most of the teachers had left to advise club activities, so there usually weren't many people around. She thought about checking on her eyebrows if no one else was there, but…

"Yawn. Making lesson plans is hard work."

Suama's eyes moved to the female teacher sitting almost right next to her who looked like an elementary school student.

It was Tsukuyomi Komoe.

Looking at the mountains of papers around her, it was clear she was working on more than a single teacher's worth of material. This small teacher would always go over the data on each and every student and come up with the best lesson plan for each student, but now she was working on another teacher's class as well.

Quite a bit of Anti-Skill was currently out making war preparations, so they didn't have time to make lesson plans. This meant that the non-Anti-Skill teachers had to help them out.

Suama had been forced to make another teacher's lesson plan as well, but the teacher wearing the inverted triangle glasses couldn't help but be more interested in Komoe-sensei's small size.

"What kind of health system do you use to keep your skin so young? In fact, these numbers don't add up."

"??? What seems to be the problem? I'm quite good at math, if you need any help there."

The 135 cm teacher quickly came walking over after hearing Suama's perplexed voice. Suama knew she should learn from her senior teachers, but this one really looked like she was in elementary school.

Tsukuyomi Komoe took the documents on Suama's desk and nodded as she checked over each of them.

"By the way, Oyafune-sensei. I heard my students caused you some trouble today, so I wanted to apologize."

"No, it was nothing."

"Oh, that reminds me. I wanted to have a word with Kamijou-chan and the others. Do you know where they are? It seems they went off somewhere right after homeroom. Do you think they went home?"

"Uh, oh."

Suama looked over at the clock on the wall.

It was almost 6 PM.

It had been a few hours since she had told them to go weed.

"Crap… I'm sorry, Tsukuyomi-sensei. I'll go get them right away!!"

"Sigh. But where are they?"

Oyafune Suama turned her back on her senior teacher and ran out of the staff room. The club activities would be ending soon and the students not part of a club were long gone, so the dim hallway was almost empty. As she headed for the staff entrance, the emptiness made it feel even later than it was.

(No, delinquents who start fights in school won't have stuck around this long. They're probably not out there weeding; they probably skipped out and left long ago.)

She had been intending to check on them after half an hour and then let them go after scolding them, so she was feeling guilty. However, they were being punished, so she couldn't exactly apologize.

At that point, she reached the staff entrance, put on her fairly high class pumps, and headed quickly behind the gym.

And what that math teacher saw there was…

Part 5

“Hey hey heeey!! It’s 13-9!! Your forkball is pretty pathetic there!!”

Kamijou held a short broom in his hands and swung it back and forth as he egged Fukiyose on.

“Shut up!! Don’t just ignore those 9 times you lost… And if I had a proper hardball, things would be different!!”

Since they had introduced a new rule where the loser of each round had to spend 5 minutes weeding as hard as they could, Kamijou and Fukiyose had gotten so fired up they had forgotten that the work would be a lot easier if they just both worked on it together.

While Kamijou was swinging the bat in a good mood, Fukiyose was gripping the white ball and her shoulders moved up and down as she panted for breath. She then checked the time on her phone.

“There’s only 30 minutes until we have to leave… But that’s more than enough time to turn this around!!”

“Hey, are your pitches actually dropping like they’re supposed to?”

“I already told you they were! They’re forking like crazy!! Why can’t you see the ball jerk down suddenly right in front of you!?”

“Ehh? It just looks like a parabolic arc to me…”

“Pay more attentioooooonnnnn!!”

Fukiyose yelled as loudly as she could and threw the ball.

In response to the white ball roaring towards him, Kamijou began the motions for a full swing.

(A forkball…)

He finally reacted to Fukiyose’s words and corrected the trajectory of the broom down slightly.

But the path of the ball didn’t change.

It continued on straight.

“Damn it…See? You’re not doing it right!!”

He tried to bring the trajectory of the bat back, but it was too late.

The bat moved slightly upwards, but didn’t quite make it to the path the white ball took.

Even so, he could tell the handle of the broom made contact with the edge of the ball.

“Gwohhhhhh!!”

Kamijou yelled, but he could feel in his wrist that he hadn’t hit the ball solidly.

The white ball grazed the broom handle, its trajectory changed slightly diagonally upwards, and it flew behind Kamijou.

(Damn, I missed!)

There were no fouls in this game. If the ball hit the bat and went in front of him, Kamijou won. Anything else counted as Fukiyose’s win. They decided between strikes and balls by sight.

One annoying point was that the loser had to go retrieve the ball. And since the loser also had to weed for five minutes, going to retrieve a distant ball was a real pain in the ass.

While still holding up the broom being used for a bat, Kamijou began thinking up a plan.

(Dah. It was 13 – 9, right? I guess I have 10 losses now. Maybe I should purposefully take forever retrieving the ball so we run out of time while I'm still ahead.)

But then he heard an odd noise from behind him.

"…?"

Kamijou had no idea what just happened, but just from seeing Fukiyose's shocked expression, he started going pale.

(??? What's behind me?)

Kamijou turned around.

He saw inverted triangle glasses with grass and dirt stuck to them.

Oyafune Suama was standing there and she had clearly been hit straight in the face by the white ball.

The ball would have hit Suama in the stomach, but Kamijou's bat had altered its trajectory enough for it to head straight for her face.

"…"

Oyafune Suama took a long, deep breath, but her body was clearly trembling.

By the time Kamijou started freaking out, it was too late.

Suama came rushing towards Kamijou and her fist swung down at him. Kamijou bowed down in apology without noticing what she was doing and miraculously managed to avoid her fist. Filled with the anger from both the ball and from having attacked the air, the math teacher stomped down on Kamijou's back with

the pointed heel of her pumps.

Part 6

Oyafune Suama rushed back to the staff room.

Komoe-sensei must have gone somewhere because she was gone.

Suama had tried using her handkerchief to wipe off the grass and dirt.

(Wah!! Dirt, dirt, DIRT!! It's on face, IT'S ON MY FACE! Oh, no! I may have wiped off my eyebrows with the handkerchief!! What do I do!? WHAT DO I DO!?)

She was obviously panicked, and, after she had confirmed that no one else was in the staff room, she pulled out her hand-mirror to check forgetting to head to the bathroom first.

At least her eyebrows were fine.

But that wasn't enough to calm her down.

It was advantageous to be beautiful.

Which also meant that it was disadvantageous to not be beautiful.

(Let's see. It's on my clothes. It's here, too. And here!! My hair is all messed up, I'm covered in sweat, and there's a run in my stockings from walking so quickly. Where do I start in fixing this!?)

She started by taking off the coat of her suit and wiped off the dirt that had made it onto her white blouse. Then she started unbuttoning her blouse in order to

shake out the dirt she couldn’t get off just by brushing it. Then she took off the beige stockings with a run in them and put on the spare one she had in her bag. In order to do this, she had to push her tight skirt up, but she didn’t have time to care. She had to turn herself back into her usual perfect beautiful self as quickly as possible.

But…

All of a sudden the door to the staff room started to slide open.

Suama was raising one of her legs in order to put the stockings on and she jumped out of shock.

“Ah. Wait. Stop!!”

She tried to stop it.

“Eh? What’s wrong?”

Her words had clearly reached whoever was on the other side of the door, but the door opened anyways.

Kamijou Touma was standing there.

Oyafune Suama currently had the front of her blouse open so her black bra was visible. Also, her tight skirt was still pushed up in order to put on the stockings.

“Ky-”

She almost screamed, but cut herself off.

Instead of screaming, she reached her hand over to her desk and grabbed the magnetic 50 cm classroom set square and threw it full force at the staff room entrance.

Kamijou slammed the door shut and the edge of the set square stuck into the door like a shuriken.

The rest of the set square twanged back and forth.

She heard Kamijou yelling from the hallway.

“Waaaahhh!! Are you trying to kill me!?”

“Why did you open the door after I told you to stop!?”

After she had gotten the stockings on, closed the front of her blouse, and put on the coat of her suit that was folded over the back of her chair, she headed out to the hallway.

But she heard an odd ripping sound come from her thighs.

“…”

Suama looked down at her thighs to see if the brand new stockings she had only worn for 2 minutes had a run in it.

“U-um…Excuse me…”

Almost as if he had timed it, Kamijou cautiously opened the staff room door again.

He saw Oyafune Suama standing with her legs spread apart, her skirt pulled up, and bent over staring at her crotch area.

This wasn’t just a scene a beauty shouldn’t let anyone see; this was a scene a woman shouldn’t let anyone see.

“!!”

This time the math teacher silently grabbed a giant protractor for the blackboard and threw it towards the door. Another piece of teaching equipment was now stuck in the once-again closed door.

A quavering voice came in from the hallway.

“I was just going to explain why I had come in before!!”

“What possible reason could you have had to make this situation even worse like that!? Explain to me your reason as concisely as you can!!”

“Um, it’s almost past the time we can stay at school. Can we quit weeding now?”

“Is that all!?”

The veins on Oyafune Suama’s temple bulged. She grabbed the giant compass for the blackboard from her desk and ran out of the staff room intending to knock that trouble student down with it.

But Kamijou Touma was gone.

She glimpsed a figure running around the corner heading for the stairs.

“What’s going on here…?”

Suama mumbled that in complete exhaustion, but there was no one around to hear it.

Part 7

“Damn it…I really thought I was dead.”

Kamijou left the school and spoke to himself as he trudged along the dark path home.

It was October now, so it was starting to get cold around this time of day. That may have been why it didn’t feel like there were as many people out as during the summer. Coming from the airship floating in the gloomy sky, he could hear an announcement giving a warning about fires due to the dry air.

Kamijou slowly walked along the sidewalk avoiding the cleaning robots and thinking about what to make for dinner. He decided to head for the department store by the station because he was a bit worried he didn’t have enough food in the fridge. There was a cheaper supermarket a bit farther away, but he wouldn’t

make it home in time if he headed there. If that happened, Index would go nuts back in his dorm room due to her empty stomach.

As he headed toward the station, he spotted a girl with brown hair wearing a Tokiwadai Middle School uniform. It was Misaka Mikoto.

And she was delivering a high kick to a drink vending machine and tilting her head in puzzlement when nothing came out.

Seeing this, Kamijou quickly turned 180 degrees and hurried away.

“It’s best to avoid danger. Let sleeping dogs lie, as they say.”

“What do you mean by that?”

When his casual comment to himself received a response from behind him, Kamijou's back straightened in fright.

He ever so cautiously turned another 180 degrees and saw Misaka Mikoto standing there with a puzzled look on her face.

“Uuh…” Kamijou let out a short sigh of anguish. “Please forgive me…”

“I asked you what you meant by that.”

“I’m just so exhausted from the weeding and all the other things that have happened today! So please forgive me and don’t give me any more trouble!!”

“Again. What do you mean by that!?”

Mikoto grabbed the nape of Kamijou’s neck, who tried to run away, at Mach speed, and yelled so close to his ear that he thought she was going to bite his ear off.

“Why must you cut our conversations short at every chance you get!? You haven’t even responded to the email I sent you yet. Let me see your phone for a second!!”

“Email…? You sent me an email?”

“Yes, I did!!”

Kamijou thought about it for a second, took out his phone, opened his inbox to show it to Mikoto, and cocked his head to the side in puzzlement.

“…You did?”

“I’m telling you I did!! What? There’s nothing in your inbox!? Don’t tell me it’s treating my address as spam!!”

Mikoto was shocked at first about her email, but then she stumbled upon a further truth.

She reached and grabbed Kamijou’s hand to keep him from hitting any more buttons and stared at a certain name in his received mail folder.

“…Why do you have my mother’s address in your phone?”

“Hah?”

(Come to think of it, I did run into Misaka Misuzu when she was drunk the other day.)

Mikoto wrinkled her brow and started manipulating Kamijou’s phone with her thumb. She was calling Misuzu.

“H-hey, wait!”

His phone didn’t have speaker phone option, so the phone’s volume was fairly high. Due to this and the fact that he wasn’t very far from Mikoto, he could hear the phone ringing on the other end.

“Yes, mother? I need to ask you about something.”

“Huh? My display must be screwed up. It wasn’t showing your number, Mikoto-chan.”

Misuzu sounded confused.

From what Kamijou could hear of Mikoto and Misuzu’s conversation, Mikoto was asking for a detailed explanation of how Misuzu’s number ended up in Kamijou’s phone.

“Hmm…”

Misuzu’s answer started slowly.

“I think I met that boy in Academy City one night…but I was drunk, so I don’t really remember the details. I have no idea when my number could have ended up in his phone though. Ha ha ha.”

“I see. I see.” Mikoto nodded slightly and hung up.

She smiled and elegantly returned the phone to Kamijou.

“What the hell were you doing with my mother while she was druuuunnnkkk!?”

“Hahhh!? What kind of crazy deduction is that!? And I’m pretty damn sure your mother remembers everything that happened! That laugh at the end really made it sound like she was lying!!”

This was something someone should be able to think through pretty easily, but Mikoto must have thought that this was a crisis that could destroy her family, because her face turned bright red as she lost her cool.

“Let’s change the subject!!” Kamijou decided to steer the conversation elsewhere. “L-look! I have to wash the rice for dinner when I get back to the dorm and surely it’s getting close to curfew at your dorm! The sun is setting already!”

“What? Curfew? That’s so easy to get around.”

Kamijou wanted to bury his head in his hands at how quickly Mikoto gave that response.

She must have been completely unaware of his state of mind, but at least he had managed to change the subject.

“But it’s true they’ve been getting stricter about checking. Maybe it’s because of how busy everything’s been lately. Even the people who never read the newspaper are busy checking the news on their cell phone TVs and checking internet news sites.”

“…”

“But I guess anyone would be worried with what’s happened.”

Mikoto was most likely referring to what happened on September 30th.

That event had been the trigger that started an invisible war.

That event where the gate to Academy City was destroyed, residents all over the city regardless of whether they were teachers or students were “attacked”, the functioning of Anti-Skill and Judgment, the keepers of the public order, was completely halted, and a 100 meter radius crater of destruction was created in the cityscape.

All of that had not happened due to a single person. It had been the result of multiple organizations and their ideas crossing paths. Even Kamijou who had been in the middle of it all didn’t know the whole story. In fact, he doubted there was any one person that understood the entirety of the situation.

And if someone in the middle of it all felt that way, someone who only got wrapped up in it like Mikoto would know very little.

Maybe it was because she was at a distance from the center of it all that she felt like she could investigate it from a safe distance.

And surely Mikoto didn’t completely buy the official story that the attack was carried out by an esper scientifically developed in secret by a foreign religious group.

Mikoto removed her gaze from Kamijou’s face and looked off into the distance.

About 500 meters from where they stood was the area destroyed by the appearance of a certain “archangel”. Kamijou thought she might have been recalling the incident on September 30th, but it actually looked more like she was staring up at an airship floating in the gloomy sky.

The news was playing on the large screen on the side of the airship.

“So far the large scale demonstrations and protests held by members of the Roman Catholic Church were only occurring within Europe, but now they have

begun within America as well.”

The announcer’s voice was calm.

“Currently, they are only occurring in west coast cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, but they are expected to spread throughout America before long.”

Some footage started playing.

It was most likely from LA.

It would have been late at night there, but it was midday in the recorded footage.

(Damn it. It’s spreading pretty quickly…)

Kamijou’s face held the expression of someone looking at a horrible wound.

Just like shortly after the start of a marathon, one side of a three-lane highway was completely filled with people. They were burning Academy City posters they had made and were ripping Academy City banners to shreds.

They were filling up major roads for hours at a time in order to get across how mad they were. They weren’t just letting their anger take over and going throughout the city destroying things.

But it still wasn’t safe.

Some fights must have broken out. The footage showed a man who had blood streaming from his head leaning against an ambulance. A nun with dark bruises across her face was supporting a priest who couldn’t stand up on his own and screaming for help.

All of the people there were just normal people.

None of them looked like they had any connection to the world of espers and magicians.

It was true that the people taking part in the demonstrations were technically a part of that world by being believers in the Roman Catholic Church. They wore

crosses around their necks and they could probably recite portions of the Bible.

But it was hard to imagine that they could have any connection with the depths of the Roman Catholic Church or know about people like Vento of the Front. They went to school and they went to work. On the weekends, they would laze around the house and have cookouts in their large backyards. They were normal, everyday people.

"…What's going on?"

Mikoto muttered this as she stared up at the screen on the airship.

"I don't know what happened on September 30th, but this isn't what I wanted. Even if they say that incident was what triggered this, Academy City is still completely peaceful. Why are those people fighting each other and injuring each other over this? It's not right for the person truly behind this to stay hidden while those people suffer."

"…"

Kamijou listened to Mikoto's words in silence.

The person behind it.

Mikoto had subconsciously decided there was one. That was probably what she wished was true. If someone was behind this, you could fix that one problem and everything would go back to normal… Since Mikoto had a powerful ability known as "Railgun", that was the easiest way for her to think about the situation.

But there was no one person behind this.

It was true that the incident on September 30th that triggered it all was caused by specific people: Vento of the Front and Kazakiri Hyouka. And there was "someone" behind their actions. If the events on that day had been properly stopped, things may have been successfully solved by the method Mikoto wanted.

But the current situation was not the spark that was the origin of the damaging fire.

This was the huge conflagration that comes about as the result of the spark.

This was well past the stage where capturing the person behind it all would stop it.

The people carrying out the demonstrations were all normal people. And they weren't being forced to do it on anyone's command. They read the newspaper or watched the news and decided to take part out of indignation. They were all merely acting on their personal beliefs.

To "stop the person behind this" you would have to punch out every single person throughout the world who was taking part in the demonstrations.

That wasn't a real solution.

But how else could it all be solved?

"…What's going on?"

Mikoto merely repeated what she had said before, but it pierced Kamijou's heart this time.

This wasn't a problem a kid could come up with an answer for.

Between the lines 1

The Tower of London was a well-known tourist attraction in England.

It was once known as a facility of blood, torture, and execution that was the last stop for prisoners. It had even been said that once you passed through its gate, you never came out alive. But it was currently open to the public and for just under 14 pounds (less than it costs to enjoy afternoon tea in a restaurant) anyone

could just go in and look around. It wasn't just the historical execution devices that were on display; you could also see treasures of the Royal Family.

But at the same time, there was a huge "blind spot" where the facility was still used for its original purpose.

Much like the deep shadow brought about by a bright light, one could get close to the Tower of London as a sightseer; but there was still a labyrinthine "blind spot". Prisoners were still kept there and they were tortured or executed without hesitation as needed. The Tower of London was well known for its executions and that dark purpose was still being carried out to this day.

If one entered through the normal entrance, those shadowy portions were completely unreachable.

If one entered through the secret entrance, one could not escape the shadowy portions.

"…This place is as gloomy as ever."

Stiyl Magnus mumbled that as he exhaled the smoke from his cigarette.

Unlike the areas open for sightseeing, areas actually used had cramped, dark passageways. The clutter of stones making up the walls were stained black by the soot of the lamps and the flicker of the flames made the stains look like they were moving. There must not have been much to keep the moisture out, because the top of the floor was covered in cold dew.

The girl walking next to Stiyl started speaking.

It was Agnese Sanctis, former nun of the Roman Catholic Church.

"So we will be interrogating Lidvia Lorenzetti and Biagio Busoni?"

"I want to ask them some things about God's Right Seat. Since the leader of a unit like you doesn't know, it'll probably be faster to ask some VIPs."

"…Do you think they'll tell you? They're practically nobles."

"You can watch and learn a few things about how we deal with that kind of thing

in England. Lecturing each and every member of your Forces would be a pain, so you can just explain it to them later."

Stiyl stopped in front of a door.

It was a thick wooden door that had been darkened by all the moisture it had absorbed.

He opened the door without knocking and there was a small room on the other side. It was a square room only 3 meters on each side. This room was only for "interrogation", so it didn't have the tools of torture one associated with the Inquisition. What was in it was a table directly bolted to the floor and a pair of two-person chairs similarly secured to the floor.

There was limited cushioning on the chair on the right side of the table.

On the other hand, the chair on the left side was nothing but bare wood. And the armrests had belts and metal fixtures to confine a person's arms.

And the two-person seat on the left had two people restrained in it.

They were Lidvia Lorenzetti and Biagio Busoni, both important people that held special positions within the Roman Catholic Church.

"I'm sure you know what I'm here to talk about."

Stiyl sat in the chair on the right and spoke in an annoyed voice. Agnese didn't know whether she should sit down as well and decided to stand next to him.

Biagio, a middle-aged bishop, was bound to the chair by a belt. He glared at Stiyl. His gaze never fell directly on her, but Agnese flinched as she was a former member of the Roman Catholic Church. Stiyl however didn't seem to mind.

It may have been due to the fact that he had been deprived of sleep to the point that it wore down his mind but didn't affect his health, but Biagio didn't look well. His hair and skin had lost their sheen and now just looked cracked and dried.

"…So you want to talk. If you're going to lecture about the Bible, leave it to

Sunday.”

“Tell me everything you know about God’s Right Seat.”

“Bring out the torture devices the Anglican Church is so proud of. I want to show an amateur like you what true piety looks like.” Biagio’s arrogance was as strong as ever.

Meanwhile, Lidvia did not seem at all interested in the conversation. It wasn’t that she was working to suppress her emotions; she truly wasn’t feeling anything strongly enough to show up on her face. Lidvia may have had more patience than Biagio whose irritation was clearly showing on his face.

This was exactly what Agnese had expected and she knew this could take a while.

“Don’t look down on Necessarius.”

Biagio was not the only arrogant one: Stiyl Magnus slowly exhaled cigarette smoke and smiled shockingly cruelly.

“We don’t particularly care if you end up dying from the torture. Necessarius has ways of getting information out of a corpse’s brain. Although that’s more a question of the level of defenses and the level of damage.”

Even Agnese felt a chill go down her spine as she heard that. He must have understood that Stiyl was not bluffing, because Biagio gave an annoyed look. Also, Lidvia finally seemed to take an interest as she moved her eyes to look at Stiyl.

Stiyl started speaking in an irritated tone that sounded like a person about to begin a job they weren’t looking forward to.

“What you call ‘torture’ and what we call ‘torture’ are two different things. Propagate ridiculous ideas like that and you’ll find that 'peace in death' won’t cut it here. I don’t care if you resist, but you will just die in vain.”

There were a few seconds of silence. Biagio continued to stare at Stiyl and Lidvia began to speak.

“We don’t care about 'trivial things like that' either.”

She made eye contact with Stiyl as she spoke.

“But there is one thing I would like to know. What is the situation ‘outside’?”

Stiyl looked puzzled at that question, but then he remembered.

(Come to think of it, there was a report about that.)

Lidvia Lorenzetti was an oddity even within the Roman Catholic Church who would reach her hand out to people society had abandoned. To her, being imprisoned in the Tower of London without being able to hear what was going on “outside” made her worry as a protector. All she had heard about was the chaos spreading through the world. After remembering, a smirk grew on Stiyl’s lips.

“I’m sure you can take some guesses about what’s going on.”

“…”

Lidvia’s expression faltered slightly. Of course, the first to fall victim to the riots and chaos were the very kinds of weak people she reached out to.

“…Hmph.” On the other hand, Biagio Busoni was much more of an elitist who believed the clergy were superior to all others. He was more interested in the effects and results of the chaos rather than the damages it had caused.

Lidvia stared at Stiyl’s face and spoke. “In exchange for my cooperation, I request that you release of all my ‘comrades’ who are imprisoned here. I want them released so they can help as much as they can to stop this chaos and provide shelter for the weak people caught up in it all.”

It was Biagio, not Stiyl, who reacted to that. Lidvia was completely composed while Biagio made no attempt to hide his irritation. He clicked his tongue so hard it sounded like he was spitting.

Meanwhile, Stiyl had no real reaction. “Do you really think we’ll go along with that?”

“I’ll make you.”

“How?”

After Stiyl asked his question, Lidvia stopped breathing for a short time. Then, her smooth lips began to move even as she was bound to the chair.

“San Pietro elude le trappole dell’imperatore e del mago. (St. Peter escapes the clutches of the emperor and the magician.)"

Stiyl looked puzzled at her words. They had taken all spiritual items and amulets from her. She shouldn’t be able to perform any real magic by chanting a spell here.

A light shined, not from Lidvia Lorenzetti, but from Stiyl's side. Specifically, it came from the Roman Catholic cross hanging from Agnese’s neck.

“Tch!!”

Before Stiyl could react, a beam of light flew from the cross. The beam of light stretched out towards Lidvia like a stake and destroyed the belt and metal fixtures binding her right arm to the chair.

Lidvia grabbed a sharp piece of broken metal and reached out towards Stiyl. Their arms crossed with a crash that sounded like a gunshot.

“…”

“…”

Stiyl and Lidvia were silent. Stiyl had a sharp piece of metal at his throat; Lidvia had the corner of a rune card at her throat.

“…! Lidvia!!”

After recovering from her shock, Agnese hurriedly grabbed her Lotus Wand that was leaning against the wall, but Stiyl used his other hand to motion Agnese away as he glared at Lidvia.

The magician was clearly enjoying himself. It was like he was saying this was

how an interrogation was supposed to be.

“Did you really think you could take my life so easily?”

“If you won’t release the needed number of people, I have no other choice.”

Lidvia spoke with an unconcerned voice.

“I demand that you release Oriana Thomson so that she can guide those who have been swallowed up by the riots.”

“Why don’t you think again about whether you’re in any position to make demands?”

Stiyl’s voice did not waver.

Oriana was the skilled courier that had been teamed up with Lidvia.

“That courier knows about the situation of the world. And she came forward with a deal for ‘her leader Lidvia Lorenzetti to be able to protect the weak.’ The Anglican Church made a deal where she temporarily cooperates with us. If you want to release her from that, I don’t think she would agree to it herself.”

“…”

Lidvia and Oriana had had the same idea; Oriana acted faster. She remained silent as Stiyl continued to speak.

“Don’t waste what she has done. This situation has been brought about by the Roman Catholic Church… no, by God’s Right Seat. So if they’re defeated, the situation might be able to be resolved, right?”

Lidvia did not respond. Biagio clicked his tongue and looked away as if to say that this were ridiculous.

After a deep, long silence, she slowly opened her mouth. “…What do you want?”

“Necessarius’s goal is clear.” Stiyl seemed bored as he spoke. “We want to save the lost lambs that have been swallowed up in the overwhelming power that is

magic. Our goal is the same as it has always been."

Lidvia glared at Stiyl but he did not flinch. Whatever it was that Lidvia had been observing about Stiyl, she finally sighed and relaxed.

"…I have never directly met them, but I have had opportunities to hear bits of information about them."

Lidvia Lorenzetti's words resounded throughout the dark interrogation room. Agnese finally sat down next to Stiyl and spread out a piece of parchment to record what was said.

"And from what I've heard, it seems God's Right Seat is…"

Chapter 2: A Trigger that Becomes a Decisive Blow. *Muzzle_of_a_Gun.*

Part 1

After Kamijou left Mikoto, he headed towards the department store by the station as he had originally intended. He looked in the perishable goods section in the first basement and decided to buy 4 days' worth of vegetables because they were pretty cheap that day.

(…Hm, the section selling completed dishes seems to be popular, while there aren't many people in the sections with meat, vegetables, and other ingredients.)

(Are fewer people cooking for themselves these days?)

Kamijou turned his head quizzically as he wondered this and left the store.

He looked up and at the airship displaying the news floating above. As before, it was about the protests in America...or so he thought. It now seemed to be about Russia. All the news was about the protests, so it became difficult to distinguish between old stories and new ones.

"..."

Kamijou stopped to think while holding grocery bags with both arms.

He couldn't get what Misaka Mikoto had told him before out of his head.

It wasn't that there was no cause behind the demonstrations and protests around the world; the problem was just so big that there were too many causes and therefore no simple way of solving it.

Mikoto probably most resented having been used in the incident on September 30th. Their efforts to bring back peace were instead used to bring about an entirely different kind of chaos.

Kamijou wanted to do something about it, too.

Vento of the Front who caused the chaos did have her reasons. And Kazakiri Hyouka who stood at a point halfway between science and magic didn't want that chaos. It was a bunch of people "outside" of it all getting all worked up and throwing the world into chaos now. That was clearly wrong.

But...

(What can I do...?)

Kamijou clenched his teeth as he stared at the airship floating up in the air.

(This problem has to be stopped. What I want to do is obvious, but what can I actually do about it?)

He could contact Tsuchimikado who knew about the underside of the Academy City. Or he could contact Kanzaki and the others at the Anglican Church. But Kamijou couldn't imagine even those people being able to completely solve a problem that had grown so large. He had a feeling that working behind the scenes to stop the problem from getting this large in the first place was their way of dealing with this kind of thing.

(Well, standing here isn't going to solve anything. And I don't even know how to contact the Anglican Church in the first place. I guess I should head back to the dorm and go pay Tsuchimikado a visit.)

(And I need to get on his case about skipping out on the weeding.)

(I suppose having contact with an agent like Tsuchimikado puts me in a better position than most students...)

Kamijou forced his thoughts in a more positive direction and started walking along the gloomy street.

Maybe it was because of all the thoughts whirling around in his head, but the

grocery bags in his hands felt heavier than usual. It was around the time everyone was heading home so the street was crowded, but he still felt like he was running into people more than usual. He began thinking that fixing dinner and preparing the bath after he got home was going to be a real pain in the ass and started seriously wondering if there was a nice recipe that let him use the microwave or the rice cooker and skip the hardest parts of cooking dinner. It seemed that Index would end up biting him because she couldn't stand to wait while watching him when he leisurely made dinner like usual.

While thinking about all this, he ran into another person.

This time it was an aging woman who looked to be in her 50s or 60s.

"Oh, sorry."

"It's all right."

The woman gave a refined smile and lowered her head.

She didn't have a stooped back, but she was about two sizes smaller than Kamijou even while standing up. She was rather heavily dressed for the start of October with a coat folded over her bent arm and a scarf around her neck. Kamijou surmised that perhaps she got cold easily.

The aging woman raised her lowered head and began speaking in a calm voice.

"I'm the one that should be apologizing."

"No, you're not. I'm the one that ran into you."

"No, no. Not about that."

Kamijou was about to raise an eyebrow at the smiling aging woman's remark when she continued.

"I need to apologize for the trouble I will be causing you now."

He heard a metallic noise.

He lowered his gaze to where the noise originated - the area next to his own

stomach.

The aging woman's arm was also there. However the thin fabric of the coat folded over it hid the area from her elbow to just past her wrist so he couldn't really see.

All he knew for sure was what he could feel on his stomach.

It felt like the tip of a hard rod and Kamijou's body stiffened slightly at the sensation.

"I'm sorry. I really am."

The aging woman spoke those words slowly and lowered her head once more.

Part 2

Misaka Mikoto suddenly stopped.

(Nnn...)

She had completely forgotten once she met that idiot, but there was something she had wanted to talk with him about.

(...The Ichihanaransai.)

She had wanted to talk to him about the cultural festival-like event that took place across the entirety of Academy City. The opening day of this year's festival was still over a month away, but because of the terrible horrible result of the Daihaseisai (the actual result was a mix of good and bad, but this was how she had already begun to think about it) she felt she should hurry up and take measures to ensure the success of the Ichihanaransai.

(Come to think of it, over half of the seven day Daihaseisai was just a string of trouble related to that idiot. If that's what's going to happen, I should just rein him in from the beginning...)

Of course, the measures she was going to take were to get him to promise to go around the festival with her.

(Why does it have to end up like this? ...Well, I guess I can just ask him over the phone.)

Mikoto decided on that and pulled out her phone.

She had gotten a pair contract on her phone with him on September 30th, so she had his number recorded in her phone.

(It really was a pain getting that all set up, but I guess it's coming handy now.)

But after she moved the cursor to his number in the address book, her eyes stopped on the antenna mark.

No signal.

"...!!"

Mikoto looked around, but the street she was on wasn't all that small, so she ran out to a more major street. She watched the antenna mark on the edge of the screen and once she had a good signal, she moved the cursor back to his number and pressed the call button.

But she just got an emotionless message telling her the phone she was trying to call couldn't be reached.

This time it was his phone that wasn't getting a signal.

"Th-this thing's hard to use... What good is a cell phone if you can't use it to talk with people when you need to!?"

Mikoto put her phone away with an irritated expression on her face, looked around, and ran off to go find Kamijou herself.

It hadn't been that long since they'd parted.

He had to be walking around this area somewhere.

Part 3

Kamijou and the aging woman walked side-by-side down the street.

There were plenty of people around, but no one gave them a second look. They looked like nothing more than a high school student carrying grocery bags and an old woman with a coat over her arm. What could look more harmless than that?

Kamijou glanced sideways at the woman without turning his head, and she gave a smile that seemed inappropriate to the situation.

"You needn't be so nervous."

She ordered him to turn off his cell phone and gave him slight instructions as to where to walk. He couldn’t refuse because of the object she had hidden in her coat. He didn't know what exactly it was, but he knew he couldn't let his guard down.

He thought it was possible that he could reverse the situation if he waited for a chance and attacked her.

(But I don't know what she's holding... If I make the wrong move, things could go from bad to worse.)

As Kamijou was pondering all this, the woman spoke quietly.

"Just act naturally. It's not like I'm saying you can't move at all."

"Yeah, well...You say that, but what do you have under your coat there?"

"Achoo!"

"Watch out!!"

The woman suddenly sneezed and Kamijou yelled out without thinking.

The other students in the area looked at him oddly, but soon their gazes moved elsewhere.

"Like I said, you don't need to worry. What has you so scared?"

"Mostly whatever it is you have under your coat that needs to be hidden from view!! What is it that you're jamming into my side anyway!?"

"Oh, my. You needn't worry about that. It's not going to go off from just a sneeze."

"G-go off? So is it what I think it is!?"

"And it makes quite a noise, too. Although it has a little device on it that silences that noise."

"That's a pretty big hint!!"

That left Kamijou trembling with fear, but the aging woman didn't seem to mind.

As Kamijou was being escorted, he noticed that they had left the major shopping district, turned onto a side street, and were now heading for an area lined with student dorms. It wasn't the area his dorm was in though. Since 80% of the residents of Academy City were students, there were quite a few areas "lined with student dorms."

(Where are we headed...?)

If they had been headed toward an old abandoned factory, his danger sense would have been maxed out, but this area didn't feel like that at all. He could smell a dinner of white stew coming from the dorms. And these dorms must not allow pets because he saw some elementary school girls gathered in front of one

of the buildings giving some stray cats cans of food.

And then the aging woman suddenly stopped.

"Here we are."

"?"

Even after hearing that, Kamijou didn't really get what was going on.

They had come to a children's park.

It didn't really look like an area set aside to be a park; it was more like it had been made solely to fill up a left over piece of developed land. Maybe it was because the standard amount of playground equipment had been forced into the area, but it had a cramped feel to it.

(Why here???)

As he stared at the entrance to the abandoned park, Kamijou cocked his head to the side quizzically.

At least it wasn't the kind of "special place" he had expected to be brought to after having someone stick something into his side on the roadside.

"Sorry about all this. Now let's go in."

As the woman said this, she continued to casually stick whatever was in her coat into Kamijou's side. He had no choice but to do as she said but couldn't imagine what possible merit his going in the park gave her.

At the woman's instruction, he sat next to her on a bench at the edge of the park.

Kamijou had expected there to be someone waiting for them in the park or that someone was going to come meet them there, but it didn't feel that way.

Kamijou bent over slightly and put his grocery bags on the ground. The woman didn't stop him from doing so. If he had a weapon in his shoe, he could have fought back, but Kamijou wasn't the type to equip himself like a ninja.

He thought of throwing a stone at her, but he realized that if he didn't have a

clear chance, all he would accomplish would be to make her raise her guard.

He decided to give up for the moment and sat back up.

He then asked the woman a question.

"So? What are you trying to start here?"

"No, no. It's nothing major like that."

The aging woman with "something major" hidden under her coat jammed into his side smiled as she spoke.

"Let's talk."

"Talk?"

"Yes. About the great chaos that is occurring throughout the world."

Part 4

She couldn't find that idiot.

"Odd..."

Mikoto went back into the small road she had just been on and cocked her head to the side in puzzlement as she searched.

She didn't think it had been very long since they had parted, but Kamijou wasn't in front of the station where they had previously met and even when she searched the different paths away from there she couldn't find him.

(Maybe he went into one of the stores around here.)

(Or maybe he got on a train or a bus and left.)

(...Actually, where is that idiot's dorm anyway? I'm not a stalker, so I have no idea where to go to meet him.)

Since she was always running into him, she didn't think it could be too far away. But when she really thought about it, she had no idea where he lived.

Mikoto folded her arms.

(Well, it's not like I have to talk to him about the Ichihanaransai right away. I can just leave for today.)

Just after she had that cheerful thought, she noticed a side street at the edge of her vision and started feeling restless.

(...I-I suppose I can search just a little longer.)

And with that she pulled up the GPS map on her phone to see if there were any streets she hadn't checked yet.

But then she spotted Shirai Kuroko's face in the crowd of people going home.

Mikoto quickly hid behind a nearby building.

(H-huh? ...Why am I hiding?)

She had to ask herself that because for some reason she had a feeling she couldn't let that twin tail underclassman see her here. Shirai was a teleporter so it would be difficult to lose her on foot once she had been spotted.

Shirai, a Level 4, was walking along the road while chatting with the girl next to her.

From the great number of artificial flowers on her head, it was most likely Uiharu Kazari of Judgment.

(...)

She felt the two girls were coming in her direction, so Mikoto moved from behind the building to a small road to the side. She then continued further and further in.

And then she realized...

(Hm? I don't remember this road???)

She looked around again, but she didn't recognize anything.

She thought she was familiar with pretty much all of District 7, but this was the first time she'd been here.

It was just a stereotypical Academy City residential area. Of course, as an Academy City residential area, it wasn't made up of apartment buildings and houses; it was instead a block of student dormitories. It was a row of square 5- to 10-story buildings not quite worthy of being called high-rise. There was a trash area right under a wind turbine. Someone must have been using the movements of the turbine to keep the pigeons and crows away.

Since all meals were provided by the school at Tokiwadai Middle School, the scents of dinner coming from the area smelled especially nice to Mikoto.

"...Well, this worked out nicely. I'll look around here and then call it quits for the day."

She arbitrarily decided on that and then started walking through the residential area.

Part 5

Kamijou looked at the aging woman suspiciously.

There was only one thing she could mean by the chaos occurring throughout the world. And that was the large-scale protests and demonstrations being held by Academy City supporters and Roman Catholic supporters.

But...

"...What do you mean we're going to talk about that? There's nothing about it you need to discuss with me."

"Oh, but there is. I need your opinion on the matter in order to solve the problem."

"Shouldn't you be getting the opinion of someone in the UN or some country's president instead?"

"The organizations holding up nations tend to be weak to religious and ideological conflict."

The woman spoke in a smooth voice.

Kamijou hadn't expected this.

"The organizations commonly referred to as countries have a bad track record in resolving this kind of problem. Many of them cry out that they have resolved the problem, but most of them have only forced them into silence using military force. Often times, this only exacerbates the situation."

The woman continued speaking in the deserted park.

There were many types of intellectuals, but she seemed most like an educator.

"The chaos currently occurring throughout the world is quite serious. Not only is it a problem that won't be easy to solve, but it will also lead to worse problems. If it isn't dealt with properly, it could even lead to rebellions that paralyze entire countries. The demonstrations and protests haven't been stopped with military force to keep that from happening. What the countries around the world really want is an example to follow in how to deal with difficult problems like this. All those countries are waiting for another country to make a move so they can see

whether it works and what effects that action has."

"...Who exactly are you?"

Kamijou asked his question carefully.

The woman sitting next to him didn't seem like an agent skilled in battle and assassination like Tsuchimikado Motoharu or Stiyl Magnus.

The way she spoke reminded him of an educator, but a normal teacher wouldn't hide a weapon in her coat in order to contact him.

(...She seems different from anyone I've met before.)

That was what Kamijou was thinking as he cautiously listened for her answer.

"Oyafune Monaka."

But she simply gave him her full name.

And she followed that up with something even more surprising.

"I am a member of Academy City's board of directors. That should tell you all you need to know."

"...What?"

Kamijou responded without thinking.

The board of directors was the group of only 12 that managed all of Academy City. It was basically the highest institution in the city. He had heard that there was a "General Superintendent" who was above even them, but the privilege the board of directors had was anything but ordinary.

But at the same time...

(...Is that really who she is?)

One of the 12 members of Academy City's board of directors should have personal guards or be able to obtain complete control over Anti-Skill with a single order. It was odd that she had come herself to contact him. And with a

weapon no less. Also, a small children's park didn't have the scope you would expect for this kind of meeting.

As Kamijou was doubting her, the woman naming herself Oyafune Monaka simply smiled.

"You don't believe me?"

"Oh, umm. I was just thinking that your scarf seemed oddly short. I would think that a member of the board of directors would use something better than that."

Kamijou just blurted something out in his confusion, but it seemed to take Oyafune by surprise. She suddenly moved a hand to her neck and touched her scarf.

"Th-this was handmade for me by my daughter. I won't let you speak badly of it."

"O-oh, I see."

Kamijou awkwardly nodded, but then something caught his attention.

"Wait. Your daughter must be an adult by now. But in that case, that level of skill is... Okay, okay!! I won't bring it up again! We can talk about something else, so quit shaking whatever you have in your coat!!"

He decided to stop pointlessly provoking her after that.

(Oyafune Monaka. The board of directors.)

Kamijou concluded that those two pieces of information may not be true.

(But she might have approached me with a fake name in order to give me some real information. I don't like being used by others, but as long as I can opt out and decide how I do what they want, I suppose I can deal with it.)

"...So what exactly do you want to talk about?"

Kamijou went right for the main issue and Oyafune nodded happily.

"A great problem is occurring in the world. That problem is a type of chaos that

is appearing in the form of demonstrations and protests."

"I know that much."

"I want to ask you to solve that problem."

"How?"

Kamijou lowered his eyebrows at her words and spoke.

"If I can solve it myself, I'd love to do so. I'm sure there are plenty of people throughout the world who are thinking the same thing, but that doesn't change anything. Nothing has been solved. We all know the problem that needs solving, but no one has solved it. Do you know why that is?"

Kamijou continued on without waiting for Oyafune's response.

"It's because there is no simple ‘reason’ or ‘cause’ behind it. No one can solve a problem that has no answer. So even though people investigate the problem for show, no one does anything about it. Can it even be solved? Surely you're not telling me to go around the world and convince each and every person taking part in those protests and demonstrations to stop."

"By the way..."

Oyafune Monaka responded without even a hint of hesitation.

It seemed she had predicted this question.

"What if there really was a simple ‘reason’ or ‘cause’ behind it?"

"What?"

"That is why I am talking with you. I am after something that you have that no one in the UN and no diplomat of any country has."

"And what's that?"

"Your right hand."

"..."

It was something only Kamijou Touma had.

He lowered his gaze to his right hand without meaning to.

Imagine Breaker.

That had to be what she meant. That was his special ability to negate any kind of supernatural power, be it magical or psychic in nature. But it had no effect whatsoever on normal events devoid of the supernatural like demonstrations and protests.

Which meant...

"You mean...that's what's going on?"

"Yes."

"So there's something supernatural behind all of this chaos and if I destroy that it'll all go back to normal? This isn't the result of what happened on September 30th; it's something that has been continuing since then? And I can solve all this because of that?"

"Exactly."

Oyafune simply nodded.

"By the way, Academy City is not the source of this chaos. According to the General Superintendent, the world's largest religious group, the Roman Catholic Church, has a scientific psychic power development institution as well."

"...?"

Kamijou was about to lower his eyebrows at Oyafune's remark, but then he figured it out.

That was what Academy City was telling the world at large.

To them, magic did not exist.

The identity of the phenomenon known as "magic" was scientifically being called "psychic powers".

The topic had to come up here, but if he corrected her it would only make everything more complicated.

Oyafune continued speaking from a purely "scientific" viewpoint.

"We at Academy City have nothing to gain from this chaos of course. So the ones behind it must be the Roman Catholic Church."

"I see..."

Kamijou nodded, but when he calmed down he noticed something that bothered him.

"But wait. There's nothing for them to gain from it either. Those demonstrations and protests are occurring within the realm of daily life for members of their church. So it's members of their church that will suffer the most from this. You don't gain anything from making people on your side suffer."

"What if they did gain something from it?"

"...What?"

"It's quite simple."

Oyafune spoke smoothly.

"For example, the official number of believers in the Roman Catholic Church is around 2 billion. That's a frightening amount. Even if you count everyone from the youngest to the oldest residents of Academy City, we only have 2.3 million. If it came to all-out war, we would have no chance from that difference alone. Even if you take into account other factors, it's hard to imagine winning against that kind of difference."

"Where are you going with this?"

"Oh, don't you find it odd?"

Oyafune responded to Kamijou's question with a question of her own.

"The Roman Catholic Church could crush Academy City now. So why did they

choose to cause demonstrations and protests throughout the world? Why didn't they choose the obvious method of crushing Academy City through numbers alone? Surely a concentrated attack would be more effective than rioting separately across the world. It seems rather indirect, doesn't it? If they can really control 2 billion people, they should just get it over with."

"You don't mean...?"

"I do."

Oyafune smiled.

"*The information saying they can control 2 billion people was a lie.* If they could do that, they would have done so by now. It may be true that there are 2 billion people around the world who wear the cross of the Roman Catholic Church, carry a Bible around, and go to church on Sundays."

"But," Oyafune Monaka moved her lips.

"The question has now become how many people are willing to *commit murder in the name of the church*. And there may well be some who are willing to. The world is currently thought to be split in two. Split between Academy City and a giant religious group. But...is it really? Is the line really that clear?"

"..."

"The people who go to worship on Sundays watch TV and use cell phones. Athletes who train their body with the science of sports medicine may pray to god before a big game. ...That's the way the world is outside of Academy City. The line is quite vague and people build up their own world made up of what they believe in by using the best of both worlds."

"The science side and the magic side...overlap..."

Oyafune gave a confused look and said "Magic side...?" at what Kamijou muttered.

But then she continued.

"Yes. The vast majority of the world thinks that way and the majority usually

wins. They are spread around thinly. People plan their lives around loans from banks managed by organizations related to Academy City and at the same time they get married at Roman Catholic churches. People like that who benefit from both science and religion cover the earth"

"So," Kamijou began.

He could feel his throat beginning to dry.

"The Roman Catholic Church is trying to win over those people who benefit from both sides?"

"Indeed. They don't want people benefitting from both sides. They want exclusive use of every single one of those 2 billion people. They want as many allies as they can get. So they have begun something. And as a result, they have set some gears turning that started these demonstrations."

Oyafune had called it "something".

That "something" was the key to this incident.

"Their goal was not to start demonstrations. They are using this "chaos" to boost their numbers and using Academy City to strengthen their foundation in order to attack the world."

Oyafune's words were clearly those of the science side.

Kamijou didn't really like the way she was speaking, but arguing about it wouldn't help.

"Academy City is especially on edge because of the actions the Roman Catholic Church has taken."

"Are you really afraid that these demonstrations could bring people over the Roman Catholic side?"

"That's part of it," responded Oyafune.

"But even if that doesn't happen, it could lead to another development. We are currently preparing for something we call an ‘economic bombing’."

"An economic...bombing?"

"If this chaos continues for a significant length of time, it could have a negative effect on the economy. And that could be the trigger to a world-wide panic. Even if the Roman Catholic Church does not grow due to this, it could end up tearing Academy City apart."

Talk of economics and panics wasn't something that really meant too much to a high school student like Kamijou.

He asked Oyafune on the bench next to him a question.

"...Can modern countries really be destroyed that easily? They haven't shown any sign of being affected so far. And I don't know too much about the economy or money at a national level, but I can't really see a huge army being destroyed due to something like the economy."

"The representatives and symbols of the scientific world outside of Academy City are mainly the major military powers. But those countries are especially weak to the economy."

Oyafune slowly answered to his question.

"Maintaining military power requires a vast amount of funds. And in a time of global chaos, the supply for those funds is limited. And no matter how low the income gets, the amount spent to maintain the military always costs a set amount. So the ones that suffer the most in times of economic panic are the major military powers. The larger the military, the more violently it crumbles."

Kamijou couldn't believe it.

Several major military powers came to his mind, but he couldn't imagine any of them being majorly affected by this.

"But those countries with large militaries store up oil and stock up ammunition, right? Can't they last for a couple of years on that?"

"Ha ha. War does not start when the emergency stores run out. Once that happens, they can no longer fight. Once it looks like the emergency stores will eventually run out, they pull the trigger. And I think that a major power pulling

that trigger is enough to tear apart the scientific world that Academy City sits in the center of."

Oyafune's oddly decisive statement left Kamijou speechless.

She must have calculations in her head that backed that opinion.

"I don't know if it is related to that possible turn of events, but Academy City is currently desperately gathering funds for a war." Oyafune continued speaking.

"We may be attempting to overcome the difference in numbers with the latest equipment and unmanned weaponry. Or there may be some other reason. We are doing it by making relatively insignificant weapons that do not take much technology to make and selling them at a high price as the latest weapons made by Academy City. And we're doing it all on the pretext of lowering the grade of the weapons being shown in the exhibition and of the goods being mass produced."

"..."

"Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church is also gathering funds for a war in the form of ‘offerings’ from believers of the church. They are doing it on the pretext of funds to help bring peace back to the world from the current chaos. The ones actually gathering the funds do not have any real plans for it, but their superiors are clearly saying it will be used to bring peace."

The greater the chaos grew the more "funds" they would receive.

The Roman Catholic Church was a giant denomination made up of 2 billion believers. If each member were to give a single yen, they would have 2 billion yen. Of course, they were not obligated to give, so plenty of them wouldn't. But there seemed to be a custom among the wealthy that the more one gave the more status they gained, so they could most likely easily get more than 2 billion yen.

"It seems indulgences have come back in another form."

Kamijou didn't really understand what Oyafune said.

(Is "indulgence" some kind of historical term?)

"Excluding the most zealous people, most people would choose science over their faith if they had to choose which had more weight. People say that heaven exists, but you never hear them saying that they therefore don’t care if they die. Science is both practical and ridiculously easy to understand. The ease with which one can understand it is the very reason so many people gather to it. But some people don't like that. Those people have used some kind of trick. And that trick has had some effect on the way the gears in people's minds usually work. This has led to the great chaos we are now seeing. That is how I see the situation."

"..."

Was that really true?

For one, was it really so hard to think that Academy City could be behind this problem instead of the Roman Catholic Church? Academy City with its 2.3 million people had to take on the Roman Catholic Church with its 2 billion believers. So maybe they caused this chaos within the Roman Catholic Church to whittle down their numbers as much as they could. Was it really so hard to think that could happen?

(...This is tricky.)

It was true that the Roman Catholic Church was at the center of the demonstrations and protests, but their potential for war wasn't spread thin the way Oyafune Monaka said it was. She thought that only because she didn't understand the magic side of the church. Kamijou couldn't exactly imagine the major players of the Roman Catholic Church like Agnese Sanctis or Biagio Busoni taking part in those demonstrations.

It was hard to think that this plan Academy City had come up with would actually damage their true potential for war.

And even if the people taking part in the demonstrations were people who were at the halfway point between science and magic, they would still be needed to keep the capitalist economy going. If people who were supposed to be working were focused on the demonstrations instead, that alone could be a blow to the economy. And if that was 2 billion people, it could be quite a major blow. If they needed money for the war, they wouldn't go out of their way to do something that would shrink their supply of funds.

Kamijou did think that it was natural to think that the Roman Catholic Church was behind this chaos if there really was a conspiracy behind it. Either way, they could take in those who fell to their side.

And if this had to do with the hidden underside of the Roman Catholic Church, Imagine Breaker would be quite valuable.

"But..."

After thinking about all that, Kamijou began to speak.

"Even if the Roman Catholic Church is causing this and even if they're using some kind of trick to do it, what exactly are they doing? My power is pretty limited. We don't know where they are or what they're using. I can't do anything about something like that. If you want me to do something, you have to at least lead me to the place I need to be in order to do it."

"Yes. About that-"

Oyafune Monaka started speaking, but suddenly stopped.

A new figure had appeared in the small children's park.

"Tsuchimikado?"

Kamijou unintentionally mumbled that name when he saw the figure's sunglasses-wearing face.

It was Kamijou's classmate, Tsuchimikado Motoharu. He had been with Kamijou until school let out, but when it had been time for their punishment of weeding, he had suddenly disappeared. Kamijou thought about asking him about that, but realized this was hardly the time.

The atmosphere was all wrong for that kind of question.

Tsuchimikado had a completely different feel to him than usual.

"Have you finished your discussion?"

Tsuchimikado wasn't talking to Kamijou.

His eyes that were covered by the blue lenses of his sunglasses were only looking at Oyafune Monaka.

And Oyafune didn't seem surprised by his appearance.

She probably knew him as the agent named Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

"Not entirely, but that doesn't matter... You can handle the rest."

"I see."

Tsuchimikado kept his response short.

He then gave a short sigh like he was getting ready to perform some tedious task.

"I'm sure you have your feelings in order about this."

"I have since yesterday."

"Then you don't mind if I start?"

"This is nothing for you to hesitate over."

Oyafune Monaka smiled as she responded and Tsuchimikado averted his gaze slightly.

He then moved his hand to his back and pulled something from his belt.

"...Tsuchimikado?"

Kamijou had been thrown a bit by having the conversation continue without him, but now he saw something he truly couldn't believe.

Tsuchimikado was holding a shining black piece of metal in his right hand.

It was about 15 centimeters in length.

It was...

(...A handgun?)

Even after figuring that much out, Kamijou couldn't do anything to stop Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

It wasn't because he couldn't guess what Tsuchimikado was going to do next.

It was because he couldn't believe that Tsuchimikado would do something as horrible as it looked like he was going to.

Bang!! A dry gunshot rang out in that small children's park.

Even so, Oyafune Monaka continued to smile.

Her body trembled and she fell off the bench and collapsed onto the ground.

Part 6

Mikoto jumped slightly at a sudden loud noise.

It sounded like a burst of gunpowder.

The high-pitched sound pierced her ears and echoed off into the sky.

(Wh-what was that???)

She thought it might have been fireworks, but October wasn't exactly the season for that.

It could also have been an esper with some kind of fire related power.

She heard a few windows opening from the student dormitories in the area. A sound that loud did draw a lot of attention. But not a single student went as far as to leave the building. It didn't draw enough attention for anyone to leave their

dinner preparations.

(So an esper is causing some trouble, huh?)

Mikoto didn't really feel like dealing with that right now, but she headed that way anyway.

She was the Level 5 Class Electromaster, Railgun. She could handle most espers on her own and she felt confident she could handle anything she got wrapped up in. If a rampaging esper and Anti-Skill were fighting it out, she could jump into the middle of it all and come out unscathed.

Even so, she had been faced with something she just couldn't handle on her own before...

(..Khh!! A-anyway, I just have to head in the direction of that noise. Let's see, was it this way?)

Mikoto shook her head to focus her mind and walked off in the direction the noise had come from.

She could see nothing but student dormitories in this residential area.

Part 7

Oyafune Monaka had been shot in the gut.

It took a few seconds for Kamijou to realize that fact.

And Tsuchimikado Motoharu had shot her.

It took a few seconds more for that fact to sink in.

Oyafune hadn't resisted. She had been sticking something hidden under her coat into his side, but it hadn't looked like she had even tried to turn it towards Tsuchimikado. She had accepted the bullet knowing full well what was going on. That's what it had looked like.

(Tsuchi...mikado?)

Kamijou slowly moved his gaze from Oyafune's collapsed body.

There was no change to Tsuchimikado's expression.

The handgun he held in his right hand still had a wisp of white smoke coming from it. Tsuchimikado put the gun behind his back, stuck it in his belt and hid it under the coat of his school uniform. He then picked up the empty cartridge that had fallen to the ground and stuck it into his pocket.

He did all of this as if it was just a job that he had no real interest in.

And then Kamijou's emotions exploded.

"Tsuchimikadooooooooooooo!!"

Kamijou forcefully stood up from the bench and grabbed Tsuchimikado's shirt. Even then, there was no change to the eyes behind those sunglasses. When Kamijou noticed this, he clenched his fist almost completely out of reflex and punched Tsuchimikado's face as hard as he could. He felt the characteristic feeling of punching someone shoot up his fingers and wrist. Tsuchimikado's upper body bent back and he fell to the ground. But even as he fell into a sitting position, his expression didn't change. He clearly hadn't felt the slightest bit of damage.

(You bastard!!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and took a step forward.

But something got in his way.

A weak hand was clutching his ankle.

It was Oyafune Monaka, the woman Tsuchimikado had just shot.

"...Please..."

She spoke even as her lips were pressed against the ground.

"Please do not...blame him..."

Those words were enough to throw Kamijou into a state of confusion.

Oyafune Monaka continued.

She smiled as she spoke.

It was an expression of thanks for Kamijou's anger at the situation.

"My actions...were not those of a representative of Academy City... My opinions... differ from those of the board of directors as a whole..."

"What?"

"They wish for this war to intensify...and for the utter destruction of *the other scientific group calling itself a religion* that represents the Roman Catholic

Church... They want to take advantage of this chaos, so they would rather this not be solved so easily..."

Kamijou looked back at Tsuchimikado's face.

As before, it had not changed.

It was the face of someone who had known all this from the beginning.

"Letting this war intensify...is completely absurd... It must be stopped."

Oyafune spoke slowly.

There was pain mixed in with her words.

"But even as a member of the board of directors...the power I have is limited. I can't turn this situation around... If you go against the wishes of the one 'above', you have your power stripped from you and what you can do is severely limited. So I had to contact someone who could destroy the current situation.."

She looked up at Kamijou.

She continued speaking as she looked him in the eyes.

"...My contact with you will eventually be discovered. And then I will have to be 'punished' for treason. I could avoid it if it was just me...but if I did that, the target of the 'punishment' would change."

The target.

Kamijou felt a chill run down his spine as he thought about that.

"So if you flee, they'll just go after your family...?"

"..."

Oyafune did not respond.

It was the silence of someone not wanting to worry someone else.

"...I...asked him to do this."

Oyafune moved on to another topic.

"Know this...He said he did not want to do this. So please do not blame him...He gave me my 'punishment' while just slightly missing my vitals...I am the one who gave him such a ridiculous request to carry out..."

"Don't speak."

Tsuchimikado Motoharu finally spoke.

He slowly stood up and looked down at Oyafune Monaka's face.

Kamijou could not see his expression from where he stood.

But he didn't really want to see it.

"I'll handle the rest. You carried out your part perfectly. I'm sure there are plenty of things you want to ask me, but there is only one answer I can give: Don't worry. You just have to remember that."

Oyafune's smile slowly widened at Tsuchimikado's words.

There was a hand-made, but not very well made, scarf around her neck.

That was most likely what Oyafune Monaka was fighting for.

Her reason for stopping the dispute between Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church and for making sure she received her "punishment" for her actions were both there.

Tsuchimikado crouched down and looked through Oyafune's belongings. He pulled out a cell phone and called an ambulance. He then wiped off his fingerprints and set it on the ground.

He then pulled something out of her coat.

It looked like a small handgun for self-defense.

Tsuchimikado put it in his belt and looked towards Kamijou.

"We need to get moving, Kami-yan."

"Understood."

Kamijou gritted his teeth and stared at the foolish woman collapsed on the ground.

"...She went to the effort of setting all that up just to get me to move. What the hell? There's such a thing as being too indirect."

Kamijou Touma wasn't exactly a famous person.

If she wanted him to move, she could have just told him what he needed to do.

And yet she put her life on the line for such a small request.

Kamijou clenched his right fist as he thought about that.

"We don't have time. I'll explain later."

Tsuchimikado continued.

"We're headed for District 23. There's an airplane waiting for us. It's the one thing Oyafune Monaka used her power to prepare. We can't waste it."

"God damn it..."

Kamijou muttered that as he followed Tsuchimikado out of the children's park.

The only thing left in that park was Oyafune Monaka covered in blood.

Kamijou gritted his teeth as he heard the siren of an ambulance in the distance.

Part 8

Misaka Mikoto found a small children's park.

It didn't really look like an area set aside for a park; it was more like the park had been made to fill in some leftover land after the student dormitories around had been built.

There were multiple vehicles parked in front of the entrance.

They were Anti-Skill vehicles.

Mikoto started in that direction, but a man dressed all in black blocked her way. The entrance was sealed off by multiple layers of yellow tape.

She caught a glance of further in the park.

There were multiple Anti-Skill men like the one in front of her gathered inside, but there were no "normal people". They seemed to be investigating the area around a bench on the edge of the park.

She had no idea what had happened there.

She had no idea what had happened, but, whatever it was, it seemed to be over.

Between the lines 2

"It seems God’s Right Seat is a group working to obtain victory over 'original sin'."

Lidvia Lorenzetti's voice rang out in the small interrogation room in the Tower of London.

Stiyl's and Agnese's eyebrows rose slightly at that. There was no term known better to believers in the Christian Church than original sin.

"You mean the 'sin' Adam and Eve received upon eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge? The 'sin' that was passed on to all of humanity as we are their descendants?"

"Yes, that much is in the Old Testament."

Lidvia took over the conversation and continued.

"And in the New Testament, the Son of God played the role that eliminated that 'sin'. He was crucified on the cross, so that he could inherit the sins of all humanity and eliminate it himself. Because of this, if we pray to the cross, eat the flesh and blood of God at Mass, and keep our faith right to the very end, our 'sin' will be washed away at the 'Final Judgment' and we will be led to the 'Holy Kingdom'."

"By the way," Lidvia said.

"...There is an exception to this."

"An exception?"

Agnese asked this question without thinking as she recorded everything on the parchment.

Stiyl glared at Agnese, but let the conversation continue.

"There is someone who did not have the 'sin' that should have been given to all of humanity."

From that Stiyl was able to figure out who she was talking about.

"The Virgin Mary."

Biagio who was bound to the chair next to Lidvia clicked his tongue.

Stiyl continued on regardless.

"As the woman who gave birth to the Son of God, the Virgin Mary's sin

disappeared because she was deeply touched by the Holy Spirit. It's known as the 'Immaculate Conception'. In other words, the Virgin Mary has no 'original sin'. As all of humanity is descended from Adam and Eve, they bear 'original sin' and pass it on to their own children."

"And so there is an exception."

That was Lidvia's simple response.

"In the New Testament, it was because there was no way to eliminate 'original sin' other than having the Son of God take it onto himself that he took the path to execution. If you take that as a basis and add in the fact that the Virgin Mary's 'sin' had disappeared, I feel the answer becomes obvious."

"You're saying there's a method to eliminating 'original sin' other than through faith in the Son of God?"

"Through a spell that could be considered cheating, yes. I have heard that God’s Right Seat has succeeded in diluting their 'sin' as much as possible, but they have not managed to eliminate it altogether."

Lidvia was bound to her seat, but she spoke as calmly as if she was in complete control.

"But because they have incompletely eliminated their 'sin', they can carry out spells of a level surpassing what normal people can. It is said that they can even use the normally unusable spells that deal with the angels and the Lord."

"...Well, I suppose eliminating 'original sin' really is the final goal of humanity. And if you could manage it, your 'quality' as a human would approach that of an angel. But..."

"Yes. 'Sin' in this case also means the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. If you lose that, you also lose the ability to be a normal magician and use the magic that is for humans to use."

Stiyl exhaled slightly.

The elimination of "original sin".

It wasn't too hard to imagine that the depths of the Roman Catholic Church would be holding a bomb like that. Having one’s "original sin" eliminated via faith in the Christian Church and being led to the "Holy Kingdom" made by God after going through the "Final Judgment" was treated as true happiness. It was just like the Roman Catholic Church to be constantly researching a secret ceremony that would eliminate "original sin".

After thinking through all that, Stiyl asked Lidvia a question.

"So the final goal of God’s Right Seat is to completely eliminate the remaining 'sin' from their bodies?"

If they succeeded in that, God’s Right Seat would truly be able to freely use the spells of the angels. And once they could do that it was possible that not even a saint would be able to stop them.

"Hee hee."

"That's not it?"

"No. Eliminating their 'sin' is just a means to an end for God’s Right Seat. Their final goal is something else entirely."

"...Eliminating 'original sin' is quite a feat. And that's merely a means to an end?"

(Then what could their true goal be?)

Lidvia suppressed laughter and continued speaking.

"They have been announcing their goal loudly from the very beginning."

"What?"

"God’s Right Seat. That is what they are after."

Chapter 3: Something Far Removed from Magicians. *Power_Instigation.*

Part 1

District 23 of Academy City was an industrial zone that specialized in aviation and space. All of Academy City's major airports were centered in District 23.

The district was covered in runways and rocket launch sites, so it lacked tall buildings like the rest of the city. As far as the eye could see, it was flat asphalt with occasional control towers and laboratories sticking out.

"It's like a field made of stone and iron…"

Kamijou said this as he stepped off the train and looked out at the landscape stretching out in front of him.

This was the place where he had fought Oriana Thomson during the Daihaseisai, but he got the impression that the security was even tighter now.

He put the grocery bags he had been carrying in a coin locker at the station. Since there were a lot of researchers in this city, the coin lockers were airtight and one had the option of making them refrigerated.

But…

"…This is expensive. Do these things usually cost this much per hour!?"

"Nyah. Looks like it'd be cheaper to just throw those bags out and buy the stuff again at a cheap super market when we get back."

Tsuchimikado had a point, but Kamijou didn’t like wasting food. He put the bags in the locker, recorded his fingerprint, locked it, and activated the refrigeration option.

Kamijou headed for the station’s exit and spoke to Tsuchimikado.

“I assume we’re catching a plane since we’re in District 23?”

“Well, we're leaving the country.”

“Seriously!? …Wait, did someone get my passport?”

“Nope.”

Kamijou fell silent at Tsuchimikado’s one word response.

Tsuchimikado sounded bored as he continued speaking.

“It’s not like we’re going for a trip overseas. Our activities are completely unofficial. And if we’re found out, we’ll be in international trouble that pales in comparison to not having a stamp or two in our passports.”

“I-I see.”

There were plenty of things he wanted to say, but the matter-of-fact way Tsuchimikado said that made him wonder if this way really was better.

After exiting the station, they were at a large-scale bus terminal. In District 23, one traveled by taking busses instead of walking.

Tsuchimikado found the bus heading to the international airport and got on; Kamijou followed suit.

Since the district had many runways and lacked buildings, the road was straight as an arrow. The speed limit was fairly high as well; the posted signs noted 100 kph.

With the asphalt plain out the window, even the gray horizon was man-made.

Large white clouds of steam could be seen rising up from the horizon.

A low-pitched tremor shook the glass, causing vibrations.

“Oh, a rocket. Looks like it launched fine.”

Tsuchimikado sighed as he said that.

Kamijou pulled out his phone and activated the television function. The news was showing various angles of a rocket leaving the ground.

“They’re saying it’s Academy City's fourth satellite. I wonder if that’s true or not.”

“If they’re launching a rocket now, one of the reasons will be to get people speculating about it. People will say it’s everything from a military satellite to a test launch of an ICBM. The more possibilities, the more effective it is in holding others in check.”

(So this is what information warfare is…)

Kamijou suddenly froze.

“…Wait. What about Index?”

He didn’t want to take her anywhere dangerous, but he couldn’t exactly leave her alone with no food.

“Don’t worry. Maika will be going to your room, Kami-yan. She’ll probably be only a third as hungry as usual after Maika’s done with her.”

Kamijou was relieved to hear that, but then realized that his sole purpose in Index’s eyes was to make food for her.

Before long, the bus arrived at the international airport.

Kamijou got off the bus and checked the time on his phone.

“Tsuchimikado. Where exactly are we going anyway?”

“France.”

Tsuchimikado responded casually.

“Ugeh!? Europe! That’s a long ways away… Wait, how long are we going to be gone? And doesn’t a flight to Europe take something like 10 hours?”

“No, we’ll be there in just under an hour.”

“Hah?”

Kamijou responded in confusion.

Tsuchimikado seemed to be annoyed at having to explain, so he simply pointed to the runway a bit away from the terminal building.

There were multiple large passenger planes lined up, each a few dozen meters long.

“We’ll be getting on one of those.”

“…Please tell me you’re kidding.”

Kamijou was almost speechless as he asked Tsuchimikado for confirmation.

He had ridden on a plane like that once before.

“If I recall correctly, that’s the type of plane that took me from Venice to Japan.”

“Yeah, that’s what I heard, Kami-yan. I didn’t have much involvement in the whole ‘Queen of the Adriatic’ incident, so I don’t know the details.”

“So are those really the ones that fly at 7000 KPH?”

“Hahaha,” laughed Tsuchimikado. “The faster the better, right?”

“That’s too fast!! When I was riding that thing, it felt like a thick metal sheet was slowly crushing my body! Index had finally started opening her heart to the science side and that thing made the shutters over her heart seal up tight!!”

There was also the part where Index had ordered some in-flight food and it flew behind her spectacularly.

“Oh, c’mon, Kami-yan. We’re heading out on an unofficial overseas mission. Did you really think we were going to head to France while we leisurely ate an

in-flight meal and watched a movie?”

“W-well, no. I was expecting there to be a little more tension than that, but… Wait. We’re really getting on that thing? I-I really can’t recommend the experience!!”

“Don’t worry. Don’t worry. After you exceed Mach 3, an amateur won’t feel the difference.”

“How the hell is that supposed to make me worry less!?”

Kamijou kept complaining, but Tsuchimikado stopped listening and started explaining what to do once they got on the plane. It seemed there were no other planes, so they really had no choice. Tsuchimikado led Kamijou through a door for "authorized personnel only" and down a corridor that led them to the supersonic passenger plane while circumventing the general-use gate.

Part 2

“The C-Document. That’s the name of the spiritual item in the center of all this.”

Tsuchimikado’s voice resounded throughout the spacious plane.

The supersonic passenger plane was a size bigger than usual passenger planes, but they were the only two on board, disregarding the crew, making the plane feel quite empty.

Since they were the only two passengers, Kamijou and Tsuchimikado were sitting right in the middle of the area with the nicest first class seats. Unlike the cramped economy seats, they had more than enough room to stretch out their legs.

Tsuchimikado was facing the seat next to him where Kamijou was sitting.

“Its formal name is the Document of Constantine. The Christian Church originally underwent persecution by the Roman Empire until Emperor Constantine recognized it as an official religion. The C-Document is a document created for the Roman Catholic Church by Constantine.”

Those words weren’t the words of the classmate Kamijou knew. Tsuchimikado Motoharu was now in full magician mode.

“The C-Document stated that the Roman Pope is the leader of the Christian Church and that the land in Europe that Constantine ruled over belonged to the Pope. Since Constantine owned the majority of Europe, it essentially meant that the Pope owned Europe and all of the people living there had to obey the Roman Catholic Church. From their point of view, it’s a certificate that grants the Roman Catholic Church things that sound way too good to be true.”

Tsuchimikado continued speaking as he worked with the LCD touch-screen next to his seat.

“As a spiritual item, the C-Document’s power is… well, you could say it’s kind of like a compass. For the land Constantine ruled over about 1700 years ago, you can use the C-Document even today to make symbols appear that indicate that that land was inherited from the emperor. Since the emperor’s inheritance is composed of things given to the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church is given the lands and items that correspond on the C-Document to develop or use as necessary."

Tsuchimikado stopped speaking and stared at Kamijou’s face.

“Kami-yan, are you even listening?”

“Ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ugh-ughh-ughhh-ughhhh!!”

Kamijou could not respond.

7000 kph. The powerful g-forces created by such a speed were crushing Kamijou Touma’s internal organs, leaving him unable to respond properly. It felt as if there were a basketball being pushed up against his stomach while someone stomped on it as hard as he or she could.

By being perfectly fine in that circumstance, Tsuchimikado was the strange one.

“Well, whatever. Just listen up.”

“Ugh-gh!!”

Tsuchimikado was not sure whether that was a response or a moan.

“As I said, the C-Document sounds a bit too good to be true for the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, a 15th century scholar declared it to be fake, and he was right. The C-Document’s effects and powers as a spiritual item are quite different.”

“Ggh-gh-ghh-gh!!”

“The real power of the C-Document acts on a much greater scale. It distorts that which is said by the Roman Pope to be ‘accurate information’.”

Tsuchimikado smoothly moved his lips as he spoke quietly.

“For example, if the Pope declared that the members of a certain faith were enemies of humanity that were upsetting the public order, it would be a fact from the moment he said it. If he declared that 'you will not burn your hand if you touch a hot sheet of metal as long as you pray while you do', that too would be believed without a shred of evidence.”

“Ohh-gh-gh-gh!”

"C’mon, Kami-yan! At least look this way!”

Kamijou’s upper body was shaking violently but he still managed to speak.

“So… if he uses that C-Document… everything the Pope says… is true…?”

It seemed he was actually able to follow the conversation well enough to grasp that much. Kamijou was trying to see if talking rather than listening alleviate his pains. It was his last resort.

“So… he can make everything he desires to come true? …Kind of like the Ars Magna in alchemy? …Oghh!!”

“No, not like that.”

Tsuchimikado looked so carefree it almost looked like he would start humming.

“The C-Document can only make people 'believe' that things are true. No matter how ridiculous it is, it makes people think it must be true because the Pope said it is. It doesn’t actually alter the laws of physics.”

Tsuchimikado did something on the touch-screen installed in the armrest.

“Also, it only makes people believe if they care what the Roman Catholic Church says. Conversely, people who don’t care whether what the Roman Catholic Church says is true or not aren’t affected by it. For better or worse, this spiritual item is solely for use by the Roman Catholic Church.”

“S-s-so… it’s a spiritual item that makes people think what you say is true? B-but that’s… Ugh.”

“Haha. I guess it might sound like cheating. But there are plenty of tricks that were used to maintain one's majesty back in the day when the things powerful people said were taken as absolute laws. After all, the majesty of those powerful people determined whether people believed on those absolute laws of theirs or not. And if that belief wavered, the entire country could be in danger. Even in Japan there was the practice during the Edo period of cutting people in two if they spoke badly of the samurai. What easier way of regulating the ideas people have is there?”

“S-s-s-s-so…they made the C-Document because…”

“Yes, because they were afraid. They were afraid of losing control of the world they had created. The Roman Catholic Church has had multiple crises throughout history. But the Christian Church and God are supposed to be absolute. God is supposed to be a being that will save humans from any crisis. And yet the population of Europe fell greatly during the black plague, there were many failures during the Crusades, and no one knew when the Ottoman Turks would attack Europe en masse.”

Tsuchimikado said this all in an unfeeling voice, but there was a compassionate glint to his eyes.

“The idea that ‘God is absolute’ was challenged again and again. And the Roman Catholic Church needed to keep that idea around. That’s why they needed the C-Document. With it, they could ensure that the people’s hearts would stay with them even in the worst crisis.”

You could almost say that it was a spiritual item that filled in the gap between the ideal and reality.

It was a tool that protected the hope of the people by forcing them to “believe”.

It could seem quite cruel, but at the same time there was some kindness in the intention behind it.

(S-s-so the Roman Catholic Church is using that C-Document now…)

Kamijou took deep breaths as he thought.

(They’re making people believe that the information that the people of Academy City are the bad guys is “correct”. And because they’re forcing that information on people, it’s showing up in the twisted form of these demonstrations.)

Kamijou then moved his lips that had turned pale from the effect of the G’s.

“B-b-b-b-but…if they had such a dreadful spiritual item…why haven’t they used it yet…?”

“Because the effects of the C-Document are enormous. Once something is set as being ‘correct’, it’s hard to take it back even by using the C-Document again. Because of this, they can’t be setting every little thing as ‘correct’.”

Tsuchimikado answered the question smoothly.

“Also, the C-Document isn’t exactly easy to use. As I said, it makes people think that something the Roman Pope said is ‘correct’. It can’t be used by just anyone and it can’t be used just anywhere. It was originally made so it could only be used when it was at the center of the Vatican. The command spreads around the world all at once from there via leylines.”

“Eh? Ghh... B-but aren’t we…heading to go keep them from using it?”

“We are.”

“Th-then why France? You just said…the C-Document can only…be used at the Vatican…”

“Hm? Oh, right. About that.”

“A-and…you said…after they use it…they can’t delete that command, right? But that would mean…we can’t do anything…about it.”

“Let’s see. Which question should I answer first?”

As Tsuchimikado spoke, a soft electronic tone came from the plane’s speakers.

Then a synthesized-sounding female voice made an announcement. It was in a foreign language, but Kamijou didn’t think it was English. After hearing the announcement, Tsuchimikado’s face grew grim.

“…Well, it looks like we’re out of time. Kami-yan, are you really okay? If you’re not feeling too good, try taking some deep breaths. C’mon, breathe in."

“Huhh.”

“Breathe out.”

“Hoo.”

“Breathe in again.”

“Huhh.”

“And breathe out again.”

“Hoo.”

After doing that, Kamijou did feel better…or at least he thought he did.

But Tsuchimikado’s face looked more and more grim.

“That doesn’t look too good. Maybe you’d feel better if you vomited? Well, c’mon, Kami-yan. Take off your seatbelt and follow me. C’mon, there are no

flight attendants, so you don’t have to worry about getting in trouble, Kami-yan.”

Tsuchimikado stood up from his seat calmly and Kamijou slowly followed. Kamijou didn’t feel like he was moving of his own free will; he felt like he was removed from the situation and his body was moving on its own.

Tsuchimikado walked down the passageway, opened a door, walked into an even smaller passageway, stepped through a hatch so low it looked he was going to hit his head, and walked into an area that was just bare metal where a rumbling noise could be heard from all around.

(Where are we?)

Kamijou was in a daze and took a backpack like object Tsuchimikado handed him.

“Here. Put this on.”

“??? Tsuchimikado? What was that about feeling better if I vomited?”

“Don’t worry. Don’t worry. I’ll be opening it up soon, so hurry up and put that on.”

Tsuchimikado had already gotten the belts attached to the backpack wrapped around his body. The whole thing was pretty excessive. There were belts connecting the backpack to him not just over both shoulders, but around his stomach and chest too.

Kamijou didn’t really understand what was going on, but put his own belts on the same way he saw Tsuchimikado do it.

“Okay, Kami-yan. Looks like you’re ready to go.”

Tsuchimikado used the palm of his hand to press a big button on the wall that looked like the lid of a tin can.

“Okay, now you can vomit as much as you want!!”

Kamijou heard an odd, loud noise.

Just after Kamijou realized it was the sound of a large pump, a large portion of the wall suddenly opened revealing nothing but the blue sky.

“What?”

Kamijou was completely stunned.

And before he could think any further, a violent wind arose inside the plane and started sucking everything out.

“Ts-Ts-Ts-Ts-Tsuchimikadooooooo!?”

Kamijou frantically grabbed a protuberance on the wall, but he doubted he could hold on for long.

In the midst of the roaring wind, Tsuchimikado had a huge grin on his face.

“C’mon, Kami-yan. You’re all set up, so vomit as much as you want!”

“You shut the fuck up!! W-why the hell would you throw open the luggage hatch!?”

“Because if we landed at a French airport like a bunch of idiots, those Roman Catholic bastards would find out. This plane’s headed for London. We’re getting off partway there.”

“Are you stupid!? Think about how fast this plane is moving! Throwing open the hatch at over 7000 kph will tear the plane to pieces!!”

“Sorry, but it’s already open.”

“We’re gonna die!!”

“You’re the stupid one, Kami-yan. If I had really done that, we wouldn’t be able to sit around talking to each other like this.”

The plane must have lowered its speed in order for them to get off. And it was true that Kamijou was feeling better since he wasn’t being affected by the G’s as much…

“H-hey. Then what were those deep breaths for!? They were pointless, weren’t

they!?”

“C’mon, Kami-yan. Quit struggling in vain and let go of the wall already.”

“I was grateful. I was truly grateful that you were worrying about me!! And yet you were just being a bastard!!”

“Just shut up and go.”

Tsuchimikado kicked Kamijou’s hand from the protuberance on the wall and the spiky-haired boy lost his last support.

The strong wind blowing out of the plane picked him up and he flew out of the baggage hatch and into the empty sky.

It was just past noon local time.

Below the refreshingly blue sky, a high school boy was screaming his lungs out.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!!”

There was only blue sky 360 degrees around him.

It was probably due both to him flailing his arms and legs around and to air resistance moving the wind in an odd way, but his body was tumbling in confusing directions.

(Wh-what's going on? Just a few hours ago, I was having a forkball competition with Fukiyose. So why was I just flung out into the sky above France!?)

As he was tumbling, he managed to spot Tsuchimikado jump from the plane smiling like someone who was really into sky sports.

(I'll kill him… When we get to the ground, I'm going to beat the shit out of that bastard!!)

(…Actually, how are we going to land safely?)

Kamijou's face went pale.

But then the backpack he was wearing exploded.

A large parachute opened up from inside. It must have been set to activate automatically at a certain altitude.

But it caught Kamijou completely by surprise.

"Ghhh!? My neck! I-it's caught around my-…!"

He couldn't finish his complaint.

His arms and legs dangled down as he floated down in a very natural pose.

He had no way of knowing his parachute got caught in the wind and strayed from the area he was supposed to land at and that he had landed in the Rhone River which was known for having a width of over 100 meters.

Part 3

Kamijou heard the sound of water.

What confused him was that the sound was coming from his own mouth.

His parachute had gotten caught in the wind and he had ended up in the middle of a river. He couldn't feel the bottom below his feet. He wasn't great at swimming, but he wasn't particularly bad at it either. However, with his clothes soaked and with the giant parachute wrapped around him, he wasn't floating very well.

There was no sign that Tsuchimikado had landed nearby. But since he was sinking into the water, having been separated from Tsuchimikado was the least of his worries.

He had no idea how deep the water was.

It was possible it wasn't very deep at all, but it was definitely enough for Kamijou to drown in given how disoriented he was. The water wasn't doing anything except making him panic.

He began paddling the water with his arms at a rate 2 or 3 times slower than his racing thoughts.

His arms were shaking terribly.

The shaking was due to his muscles being tired, the water robbing his body of heat, and the fear that he would never get his head out of the water. All of this put together made him feel like something was restraining his movements.

(Oh, shit.)

The air he had stored in his mouth came spilling out.

He could see the light of the sun shining on the surface above his head.

The dancing light threw his sense of distance out of whack.

(Come to think of it, this happened to me once before when I was thrown from the ice ship in Chioggia…)

As Kamijou stared at the surface, he saw what looked like an odd revolving lantern coming down towards him.

The surface burst open with a large number of bubbles.

(…!!)

Before Kamijou could be surprised, a slender hand reached out from the white curtain of air.

Just as he realized someone must have dived into the water, the white hand grabbed his wrist.

He was then pulled up by a strong force.

Kamijou's body was oddly limp as he was pulled towards the surface as if by a rope.

It didn't even take 10 seconds for his face to breach the surface and meet the air.

He heard a loud splash.

He had a hard time breathing in the oxygen he had been wishing for so badly.

The muscles moving his throat and lungs weren't working properly.

"A-are you okay!?"

He heard a girl's voice nearby.

The parachute continued to act as a weight pulling Kamijou's body down. The girl raised her voice as she supported both their weights.

"I'm going to head for the bank. Just stay limp like that!!"

When they got near the riverside…or rather a shallower portion of the river,

Kamijou managed to sit down. Due to his clothes and the parachute absorbing so much water, he felt very heavy. And the cord for the parachute had gotten all tangled up as he had struggled in the water making it nothing more than a hindrance.

“I-Is this how it works?”

The girl stretched out her slender hand.

Kamijou heard a loud clicking noise and found he was finally free of the parachute.

He then slowly stood up from the portion of the river he was in that was no deeper than a puddle.

He looked up and saw the sun high in the sky, so it had to be just past noon. But there was no one else around except for Kamijou and the girl. Perhaps people were staying indoors out of fear of the demonstrations and riots.

He looked around.

There was an arch-shaped stone bridge nearby, but it was partially destroyed and only went partway out over the river.

The girl may have jumped into the water from there.

Kamijou then turned towards the girl who had saved him.

He was supposed to be in France, but the girl was Japanese.

She looked about the same age as Kamijou.

She had shoulder-length black hair and double eyelids. She was wearing a pink tank top and white knee-length pants. She had an overall slender silhouette.

“Did you swallow any water…?”

The girl looking at him worriedly looked familiar.

He was pretty sure she was…

“Cough. Itsuwa of the Amakusas?”

“Ah, yes. Nice to see you again.”

Itsuwa cutely bowed her head.

But she was supposed to be living in London along with the rest of the Amakusas. She wouldn’t be in France for no reason.

(Why is Itsuwa here? …Actually, there’s only one reason why she would be here.)

“Hey, Itsuwa. Were you called here by Tsuchimikado?”

“Um…Who is Tsuchimikado-san?”

Betraying Kamijou’s expectations, Itsuwa cocked her head to the side in confusion.

“Cough. Huh, that’s not it?” Kamijou clearly hadn’t expected that. “I mean, surely you’re here because the Roman Catholic Church is using the C-Document to cause the demonstrations and protests around the world, right?”

“H-how do you know about that!?”

Itsuwa brought her hand to her mouth in surprise.

“I-it’s true that we were investigating the C-Document, but how do you know about the lead it took us so long to find!? I suppose it should be expected of the one who defeated the Priestess in a single blow!!”

Her eyes were sparkling for some reason, but Kamijou had no recollection of any such event due to his lost memories. It actually kind of scared him.

(What the hell did I do to Kanzaki?)

“Um, well, uh…Why did you come floating down on a parachute all of a sudden? Are things okay at your school in Japan?”

Kamijou was faced with an even more basic question.

He scratched at his hair that was wet with dirty river water as he answered.

“I came here with Tsuchimikado in order to put a stop to the C-Document. Did the Anglican Church not inform you of Tsuchimikado’s actions?”

“We were investigating the leylines and other magical properties of the land in France on a request from the Anglican Church.”

“I see.”

Kamijou wasn’t really paying attention. But then he blinked.

“We?”

“Yes,” Itsuwa said and gave a small nod. “The 52 combat-ready members of the Amakusa-style Church. We’re all going around to the major cities in France. I was in charge of Avignon, but then you came falling from the sky…”

“…I see. So this is Avignon.”

He had been dragged along and dropped from the plane by Tsuchimikado, so he had had no idea where he was. When he thought about it, he was really lucky he had run into a Japanese person he knew.

And since Tsuchimikado had been taking him to Avignon, it was highly likely the Roman Catholic Church had the C-Document here.

That meant this was an enemy base.

And Kamijou had fallen right in the middle of it.

“Hey, Itsuwa. Tsuchimikado had said the C-Document could only be used at the Vatican.”

“Th-that’s true.”

“Then why were you investigating France and not Italy? I asked him, but I was thrown out of the plane before he could answer.”

Itsuwa must have thought that last part was some kind of joke she didn’t get, because she gave a bit of a forced smile.

And then Itsuwa remembered something.

“U-um… Can I go get my bag before I answer that?”

“Your bag?”

“I left it on top of the bridge. I-I’m a little worried it might get stolen.”

She must be referring to the half-destroyed arch-shaped bridge that was nearby.

Apparently, she really had jumped from the bridge.

“I see. Oh, and thanks. I really would have been in trouble if you hadn’t saved me.”

“N-no, no! It was nothing, really!!”

Itsuwa shook her head back and forth at an amazing speed and waved her hands in front of her face as she said that. Small droplets of water flew from her fingertips.

Seeing that, Kamijou asked her a question.

“Oh, one more thing, Itsuwa. Do you have a change of clothes in your bag?”

“Eh? W-well, the Amakusa-style Church does specialize in secrecy.”

She was confused by Kamijou’s sudden question, but a bit of pride could be seen in her expression as she gave that explanation.

“Most of my luggage is at the hotel, but I do have a change of clothes with me in order to tail someone or to get away. I haven’t had to use it so far, though.”

“I see. Good.”

“?”

Itsuwa still didn’t understand what he was talking about.

But Kamijou was reluctant to directly tell her.

So he moved his gaze from Itsuwa to the blue sky and pointed at what he was talking about.

“…”

Itsuwa followed Kamijou’s finger with her eyes and saw what he was pointing at.

Her chest.

More specifically, at her pink tank top that had gone see-through and was sticking to her from being wet and thus was causing her full silhouette to be visible.

Part 4

Now, Itsuwa was a girl with a peaceful and honest personality.

Even with Kamijou directly pointing out the issue, she made no eccentric actions such as slapping him, biting his head, frying him with a billion volts of electricity, or anything else. Her face merely turned bright red and she gave a strained laugh. She merely said, “Ah. Ah ha ha. Sorry about showing you that. Ah ha ha ha ha,” and crossed her arms to hide her chest and jogged off towards the stone bridge the bag with her change of clothes was on.

She was smiling, but there was a hint of tears in her eyes. It felt like a quite sensible and adult reaction.

“Hmm…”

For some reason, Kamijou was left feeling really awkward about the whole

thing.

He stared off into the distance wishing she had at least screamed or something.

Ten minutes later, Itsuwa was back wearing different clothes leaving Kamijou wondering where exactly she had changed. She was dry now, but she must have still smelled of river water, because he could tell she had put on some perfume.

“S-sorry for keeping you.”

Itsuwa had a large bag over her shoulder.

She was wearing a pale ice cream-like green blouse and dark brown pants short enough to leave her calves visible. The blouse was made of material so thin it almost made you think you would be able to see through it if the sun was shining on it. The shirt wasn’t held closed by buttons; it was instead tied just above the navel.

That shirt was all she was wearing on her upper body.

“…Itsuwa-san?”

“I-I had no choice! I only had it to put on over the tank top to make it look like a different outfit! So please don’t say anything!!”

It seemed she was telling the truth, because on closer inspection the blouse didn’t even have buttons. Tying the front was the only way of keeping it closed.

She must have known that she was pushing it with that outfit, because she curled up a bit to avoid Kamijou’s silent gaze.

But she was stuck in this situation because she had jumped into the river to save him.

Kamijou used all the limited resources of his brain to try and find something to say.

“Well, with the way Kanzaki dresses, this is okay, right?”

“The Priestess doesn’t dress sluttily like this!!”

Itsuwa went all out denying that Kanzaki dressed inappropriately, but then realized again that she was dressed “sluttily” herself and her entire face turned red.

(Well, with the way Kanzaki acts like she could party all night, it works. The way Itsuwa is getting all embarrassed, trying to hide herself, and fidgeting around, it makes her stand out even more.)

“I don’t really know who Tsuchimikado-san is, but, if you’re here to retrieve the C-Document, maybe we should work together until you can meet up with him.”

Itsuwa may have wanted to quickly move the subject away from her outfit, because she kind of forced the topic to their job.

Since Kamijou didn’t know a lick of French and had no passport, he couldn’t exactly go back to Japan on his own, so he was hoping things would work out the way Itsuwa had suggested.

“W-well, it’d be a huge help to me if we could do that.”

“Okay, first let’s find somewhere to sit. We can discuss some things.”

Kamijou was about to agree, but then he looked down and saw what he looked like.

“I’m soaking wet… I’d like to at least get this mud off.”

Itsuwa’s back straightened suddenly after hearing Kamijou’s casual comment.

She hurriedly rummaged through her bag.

“W-w-well…I-I have a wet towel you could…”

Before she could finish, a towel was draped over Kamijou’s head.

He turned around in surprise and saw a white man walking with a large dog. The man didn’t even turn around and waved a hand while saying something in an annoyed fashion that must have meant something along the lines of “You can keep it.”

“…Ah. There are some nice people here. Why do French people have a cool way of doing every little thing? …Hm? Itsuwa, why did you just stiffen up like that?”

“N-no reason...”

Itsuwa’s shoulders drooped. Kamijou tilted his head in puzzlement as he wiped the mud from his face and clothes with the towel.

“Oh, right. They’re having those demonstrations and riots here, right? Do they have inspections? You see, I don’t have my passport with me.”

“They have plenty of inspections, but at most they’ll check your belongings. I don’t think they’ll ask you for your passport. And I can trick the inspector using magic.”

Itsuwa readjusted her bag’s shoulder strap as she mumbled something about a hot towel working better than a regular one.

Avignon.

The old town of that city in southern France was surrounded by about 4 kilometers of castle walls. There were a large number of buildings crammed into that limited space. In the city’s golden age, it was hugely influential on the entire culture of Europe. Partially because of that, it was still one of the leading tourist spots in France.

“…Hmm. So you were investigating Avignon for the C-Document? I understand that much, but…” Kamijou asked for an explanation from Itsuwa while they walked through an arched castle gate leading inside the large stone walls and to the old walled town of Avignon.

They entered a plaza-like area and Kamijou saw what looked like an open café. The sign on the side of the road for the café had something written in French (at least Kamijou thought it was. He wasn’t sure.) and English. It must have been a café for tourists because it had a lot of things to help accommodate people who were here for the first time.

Itsuwa brought Kamijou away from the plaza and into a small pathway. Kamijou assumed there must be a hole-in-the-wall place Itsuwa knew about.

“I know you said we were going somewhere we could sit down, but…”

“Y-yes?”

“Why Drory Coffee? I mean, I know it’s a foreign company, so it isn’t surprising that they have them in France, but this is exactly like the Japanese chain. Couldn’t we go to a store that’s more…y’know, the kind of little known place that was started by some old couple or something?”

“W-well, there are places like that, but…”

Itsuwa sounded apologetic.

“Um…Places like that have mostly local people in them, so Japanese people like us would stand out more. It’s much safer to be at a chain that lots of Japanese tourists go to…”

“Nnn…” Kamijou moaned.

He kind of agreed with her, but then he realized something else.

“…Wait a second, Itsuwa. I’m still pretty dirty.”

He had been given a towel back at the river, but he couldn’t get everything off with that. He was mostly dry now, but the mud wasn’t going anywhere.

“If I go in a store like this, won’t I get kicked out as soon as they see me?”

“You’ll be fine.” Itsuwa responded casually. “The way things are now, you’re fine.”

Kamijou figured out what she meant as soon as he stepped into the store.

The layout of the store was exactly the same as the ones in Japan.

The walls facing the road were covered in glass and in front of the glass there was a long table with seats lined up in front of it. The center of the floor had booth seats for four and the counter where you ordered was all the way in the back. Kamijou couldn’t read French, but from the “no smoking” marks on placards placed around the store, the entire store must have been a “no smoking”

area.

The only differences from Japan were about the people inside.

Obviously, the people were French instead of Japanese.

There had been no one around where he had landed after parachuting in, but the store was packed. They may have been afraid of the demonstrations and riots, but they still had to go out to make a living. People were only going to the places they had to which concentrated the streams of people to specific areas.

And there was another difference.

The majority of the customers had disheveled hair and clothing, were covered in mud, and had bandages wrapped around their limbs. Everyone from the strongest adult to the smallest child at the very least had bruises on their faces. You would have been hard pressed to find someone who was unscathed.

“So this is what the results of the demonstrations and protests are…”

Kamijou sighed as he spoke.

So far, Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church had been showing their opposition for each other, but no full-blown military actions had been taken. However, this had caused a change that was having a real effect on the world nonetheless. Even though no one had wanted this horrible change.

“We have to do something about this as soon as possible,” Itsuwa said in a quiet voice.

“…I know. And we’re here to figure out how to do that,” Kamijou responded.

This was no time to leisurely eat some food, but Itsuwa pointed out that they would stand out if they sat down without ordering anything. Kamijou agreed because he would have felt awkward having a discussion while the workers glared at him, and he headed for the counter.

Of course, the young woman standing behind the register was French.

(Now then…)

“I-Itsuwa-san. Since I’m in France, do I have to speak French?”

“What?”

“I’m wondering if there’s any chance some French people might understand English.”

“Well, I think most people in the EU would understand English. Unlike an island nation like Japan, the sense of nationality here is a little bit weaker. See, that customer over there is German. Oh, and that one’s Italian. Since they have to speak with people from a lot of different countries, most employees dealing with customers at chain stores have to know more than just French.”

“I-I see!!” Kamijou was suddenly filled with motivation.

The time had come to show the fruits of his labors with the “English Training Made Easy” app on his phone.

He had actually been a bit discouraged because he had been stuck at practice level 4, but this was no time to worry about that. He walked purposefully towards the counter and spoke before the worker could ask him for his order.

“Coffee and sandwich, please!!”

His pronunciation was quite bad, but the woman nodded.

(Sh-she understood me!!)

But just as Kamijou was celebrating his English skills, the woman said something in a foreign language that must have meant, “That will be 7 euros”.

Kamijou freaked out.

They didn’t take yen.

“Wh-what do I do…!!”

Kamijou’s expression made it look like he had been struck by lightning, but Itsuwa handed him a euro bill.

(Okay, I need to pay her back for that. …Wait, how many yen is a Euro?)

As Kamijou was wondering that, Itsuwa spoke to the worker.

“U-um, I would like an espresso, a black ham sandwich, and some healthy vegetable sticks.”

The French worker nodded again showing she had understood and Kamijou yelled in shock.

“Ehh, Japanese!? I could have used Japanese!?”

When he looked closer at the workers, he noticed that they had a bunch of small flag-shaped badges on their shoulders. They most likely indicated what languages they could understand.

This made Kamijou really doubt his English ability. It was possible she only understood his pronunciation because she knew Japanese.

Kamijou was fairly disheartened as he took his tray and went ahead to find a table. Itsuwa came a bit later.

Itsuwa first put her tray on the table and then put the bag hanging from her shoulder down by her feet.

Kamijou could hear a heavy metallic clank come from the bag.

“…?”

He looked towards the bag.

When he did, Itsuwa’s face went red and she shook her hands in front of her face.

“D-don’t worry about that.”

“Yeah, but…”

He was about to continue when Itsuwa spoke while barely moving her lips.

“(…Um, I have a weapon in there.)”

“Hah?”

“(…The grip is split into 5 parts. When I need to use it, I can connect the attachments making a single spear. I know adding in the joints makes the spear less strong, but this way I can carry it around with me.)”

(Come to think of it, I did see her swinging around a huge spear in Chioggia.)

“By the way, have you been able to contact that Tsuchimikado person yet?”

“No.”

Kamijou took his phone out of his pocket.

“…We got split up during our descent and I can’t contact him. I’m able to make calls, but it seems his phone is off or he’s out of range of an antenna. …Well, knowing him, he should be fine no matter what happens.”

He tried calling again, but there was no sign of it connecting to Tsuchimikado’s phone.

(This is a tough phone. I fell in that river and it’s perfectly fine.)

Kamijou put the phone back in his pocket.

Kamijou was thinking of having a strategy discussion with Itsuwa while eating his sandwich, but he noticed he didn’t have any napkins on his tray.

“Ah, what now? I wanted to wipe my hands off before I ate…”

For some reason, Itsuwa’s eyes sparkled after hearing his complaint.

“I-i-i-i-in that case, I can…”

Her face turned bright red and she started rummaging through the bag at her feet, but then a female worker who was coming by said something in French that sounded like an apology and plopped down a pile of napkins.

Itsuwa froze in shock while for some reason holding out a personal wet towel.

Once he had wiped his hands off with the napkins, Kamijou decided to get down to business.

“So, you said before that you’re here investigating around Avignon…Huh? What is it, Itsuwa?”

“N-nothing…”

She seemed to have lost all energy like a house plant that had been left by the window too long during the summer.

Kamijou started again.

“So you’ve been searching around Avignon, right? So why are you searching France instead of the Vatican? Did you find anything suspicious?”

“Y-yes,” Itsuwa nodded. “I was actually planning to gather some more information and then contact the rest of the Amakusas spread out around France.”

“So you found what you’re looking for?” Kamijou asked for confirmation and Itsuwa didn’t deny it.

“Do you know of the building called the Palace of the Popes?”

“?”

“It’s the largest Roman Catholic facility in Avignon. Or rather, the city of Avignon was built around it.”

“The Popes…” Kamijou muttered.

(By “pope” does it mean “The Pope” pope?)

“Hm? But wouldn’t the Palace of the Popes be in the Vatican? That name makes it sound really important.”

“Well…” Itsuwa began.

It seemed she was having trouble figuring out what to say.

“There are some complicated circumstances surrounding the city of Avignon.”

“Complicated circumstances?”

“At the end of the 13th century, there was a dispute between the Roman Catholic Pope and the French king. And the winner of that dispute was the French king. He gained the right to order around the Pope at the time. One of his orders was for the Pope to leave his headquarters and come live in France.”

“That started what is known as the Avignon Papacy,” added Itsuwa.

“And the Pope’s headquarters was the Vatican?”

“N-no. At the time, it was known as the Papal State.”

“Apparently, the French wanted to control the Pope in order to use the various privileges and benefits the Roman Catholic Church had. Avignon was chosen as the place to imprison the Pope. And the palace the Pope was imprisoned in was named the Palace of the Popes.”

“Imprisoned, huh?”

“For the 68 years of the Avignon Papacy, there were multiple Popes and they all had to act as Pope from here.”

Itsuwa chewed on a vegetable stick.

“But there are many things the Pope had to do that could only be done in the Papal State. Things like the investiture of Cardinals and various ecumenical council meetings could be carried out by a representative. But things that had to be done within the Papal State, in buildings within the Papal State, or with certain spiritual items in the Papal State couldn’t be done from Avignon in the same way.”

“Doing so would have been akin to creating an entirely new Papal State,” explained Itsuwa. “So the Roman Catholic Church needed to set up a certain trick.”

“A trick?”

“They couldn’t create the same devices in Avignon that they had in the Papal State, but by creating a magical pipeline to Avignon, they could control the devices in the Papal State long distance.”

“…So it was like connecting a computer so it could access a major server?”

“When the Pope moved back from France at the end of the Avignon Papacy, the pipeline was supposed to have been severed, but from the looks of the patterns of the magical pulsation in the ground in this area, there must have either been a facility left connected where they could use the C-Document or they may have reconnected the severed pipeline.”

“Hm…” Kamijou nodded.

He thought about what he had just been told and then spoke.

“…Have you checked inside the Palace of the Popes?”

“N-no.”

Itsuwa shrank down in her seat and shook her head.

“I’m just supposed to investigate… Once I have enough information, I’m supposed to contact the Substitute Pope so that a large team can gather and break in at once.”

Apparently, Tatemiya Saiji, the Substitute Pope, had a “special spiritual item” that was passed down by the Amakusas, but it seemed that Itsuwa thought that acting alone wasn’t a very good idea when dealing with an object that affected the entire world.

(…Come to think of it, that makes Tsuchimikado and my actions pretty irregular, doesn’t it?)

“Since Tsuchimikado came here, he must have determined that Avignon seemed suspicious from some other source of information. Which means it’s highly likely that you’re right about the Roman Catholic Church using the C-Document in the Palace of the Popes.”

But then Kamijou had another thought.

“The C-Document is property of the Roman Catholic Church, right?”

“Y-yes.”

“So why does it have to be used in the Papal State?…or now it’s the Vatican, I guess. I can’t really think of any reason they can’t just take it away from their headquarters. And just because they can control devices at the Vatican from Avignon doesn’t mean there’s magic that can only be activated in Avignon, right?”

“Well, there are multiple theories regarding that…”

Itsuwa thought for a second and then continued speaking.

“It probably takes a long time to get approval to use the C-Document. The 141 Cardinals at the top of the Roman Catholic Church must all be in agreement about it. The Pope has a lot of power within the church, but he can’t use the C-Document on his decision alone. I think that’s why it hasn’t been used very often until now.”

“There are conflicts between factions within the Roman Catholic Church and that rule prevents the C-Document from being used during one of those conflicts.”

“According to some information I heard, they don’t need all of the Cardinals’ approval to control something via Avignon because the method is so irregular. But at the same time, since they are not activating it directly at the Vatican, preparations have to be made in Avignon causing the activation to not be instantaneous like usual. And that means that if we stop the C-Document now, we may be able to stop the chaos spreading throughout the world completely.”

“But either way you have to investigate the Palace of the Popes, huh…”

“I-I just need a bit more information to have enough to get everyone to move. I think we’ll be ready to infiltrate the Palace in a few more days.”

This war was between science and magic, but Itsuwa and the other Amakusas seemed to be fighting to stop the Roman Catholic Church.

The Anglican Church probably didn’t like that the Roman Catholic Church was holding the reins of the magic side. On the other hand, they didn’t like to create direct trouble for themselves. She had said it was the “Amakusas” not the “Anglican Church”. In other words, the Anglican Church was using the Amakusas to stop the C-Document and, if the Amakusas were to fail, they would

insist that it was just a small faction acting out of their control.

“…”

Kamijou was separated from Tsuchimikado.

He felt like working with Itsuwa in her plan to infiltrate the Palace of the Popes was a better plan than heading there now on his own.

That meant he had to help Itsuwa gather the information she needed.

“Itsuwa, is there anything I can help with?”

“Eh?”

“You said you wouldn’t be infiltrating the Palace for a few days, but we need to get this done as soon as possible.”

“Th-that’s true. In that case…”

Itsuwa seemed at a loss as how to answer Kamijou’s question.

But she never got a chance to answer.

There was a loud crash as all of the windows facing the street shattered simultaneously.

It wasn’t due to thrown stones. Nor was it due to being hit by bats or metal pipes.

It was due to human hands.

Hundreds of hands pushed against the glass at once and the pressure shattered the glass. Many screams erupted from within the store and a crushing horde of people flooded inside. It was like a scene from a zombie movie.

Kamijou quickly realized what had caused this clearly unusual scene.

“A riot!?”

“Th-this way!!”

Itsuwa grabbed her bag from the ground, grabbed Kamijou's arm with her other hand, and started running. She wasn't headed for the main exit; she was headed for the emergency exit. During that time, hundreds of people stormed inside and the store was suddenly too full to move properly like in a packed train.

"They're Japanese!"

"Are they from Academy City!?"

"Crush them. Don't hesitate. They're the enemy!!"

Kamijou couldn't understand French, but he got the gist of what they were saying from the nuances their emotions gave their voices. A multitude of hands reached for his back, but before they could reach him, he managed to get out of the open metal emergency door in what was almost a roll.

He turned to look behind him.

He heard many screams from within the store coming from some women and small children inside. But before he could go back inside to help them, Itsuwa kicked the emergency door closed.

"Itsuwa!!"

"Their actions aren't enough to kill someone. There were just too many of them. The great number of rioters did nothing more than restrict their own movements. As long as they don't all fall over like dominoes, there shouldn't even be any major injuries."

"That's not the issue here!! We need to at least help the children so that-!!"

"This same thing…!!" Itsuwa yelled cutting Kamijou off. "This same thing is happening all over the world. If we went back into that wave of people, what could we realistically do? We're here to destroy the source of all this as soon as we can, right?"

"…Damn it."

"If we can stop the C-Document, this rioting will stop. If we get caught up in the rioting, we'll do nothing more than restrict our own movements. And then there

will be no one left to stop it."

(The Roman Catholic Church is causing these riots and Academy City is doing nothing to stop them.)

"…Fuck!!" Kamijou swore and then gnashed his teeth.

(And the only ones suffering are the people caught up in the middle of it all! I can't just ignore this. I'm stopping this here. I need to put a stop to this messed-up shit as soon as I can!!)

Kamijou and Itsuwa ran through a back street that had tall walls rising up on either side.

Kamijou could hear a throaty man's voice yelling. The sound of shattering glass rang in his ears. He could hear high-pitched crying. And he could even hear an explosion from gas or gasoline being lit.

He had no idea what exactly the riots were targeting.

They could be targeting chains of Japanese-owned companies or maybe they were attacking hotels that Japanese sightseers often stayed in. Whatever it was, they had lost sight of their original goal and were now flooding the streets causing mayhem.

"Itsuwa, how far are we going to run!?"

"I'd like to find an area where we won't be overrun by people for now, but…"

She cut off midsentence.

They could see another group of rioters down the street.

(Damn, they have good timing…)

Then Kamijou's shoulders shuddered as he had a troubling thought.

"Hey, Itsuwa. You've been investigating here for a while, right? Did you ever get caught up in a riot like this in that time?"

"Eh? N-no. The Amakusa Church specializes in blending into the environment

after all. Normally, I would leave as soon as I noticed any sign of a riot coming…”

“…So I was right.”

Itsuwa’s words confirmed what he had been thinking.

“Their timing is too good.”

“What do you mean…?”

“If the enemy controlling the C-Document is here in Avignon along with us, they may have seen me parachute in. And even if they didn’t see me directly, they probably detected an Academy City supersonic passenger plane drop something above the city. This reaction makes sense if the ones using the C-Document are on their guard.”

“You don’t mean…”

“This riot is their method of intercepting us!!”

As Kamijou yelled, the mass of people blocking the path drew closer.

The Palace of the Popes was in Avignon’s old city which was a small city surrounded by old castle walls. Because they continued cramming more and more buildings into the limited space, the roads were so small it was hard to even get a car through them. And since those paths were surrounded by buildings of over 10 meters in height, it created quite a feeling of claustrophobia.

And these small roads were blocked by waves of people at various points.

The people taking part in the riot seemed to even be injuring themselves.

Kamijou thought for a second and then resigned himself to what had to be done.

Unless they forced their way through the mountains of people ahead that was marching in the opposite direction, they would never make it to the Palace of the Popes. And taking a different path wasn’t going to solve that problem. The longer they put it off, the more everyone would be injured.

“Let’s go, Itsuwa.”

“Eh…?”

“We don’t have time to wait for a chance to contact Tsuchimikado. And the Amakusas can’t be here right away, right? So we have no choice but to force our way through those people and head for the Palace of the Popes. If the enemy knows we’re here, they may not stay here for long. Even if they flee back to the Vatican, they may continue to use the C-Document. Letting them bring the C-Document back to their headquarters can only be a bad thing. I’m a complete amateur at this kind of thing and even I can figure that much out. We need to destroy it here and now!!”

Itsuwa hesitated slightly, but finally nodded in Kamijou’s direction.

She had decided that they didn’t have time to wait for the Amakusas spread out throughout France to gather here.

As they spoke, hundreds of rioters drew near down the small road.

It was a solid wall made up of humans like the inside of a crowded train.

“…Stay crouched down as we go through,” said Itsuwa quietly as she looked at the rioters. “If our heads stick up above the crowd, we could easily become targets. We’re less likely to be spotted if we hide behind all the people around us. Even if this riot is the enemy’s way of stopping us, they don’t have any precise control over it.”

“Got it,” said Kamijou as he felt strangely nervous. “Here we go.”

As he said that, Kamijou and Itsuwa ran straight toward the rioters.

The rioters were as tightly packed as a wall, but they managed to cram themselves into their midst. There were just too many people to run. They could barely walk and at first they could only make it a few meters.

Someone screamed and hit Kamijou’s head.

He managed to move forward, but fat fingers grabbed his shirt.

He continued forward recklessly. He bit at the arm grabbing him, shoved his

shoulders against the wall of people, and walked forward with people still clinging to him. He felt fingernails pierce his side and blood oozed out. He could smell the body odor of men who had been worked into a frenzy. The screaming exploding in his ear and the pressure of people pushing into him from every direction gradually ate away at his consciousness.

(Damn it…)

Kamijou's legs started to weaken.

He was losing the power to move forward.

(Damn it…!!)

Just when he felt like he was going to be swallowed up by a mass of disgust, the wall of people suddenly thinned out.

Now that the air was not made up of the exhalations of others, he breathed in the fresh oxygen deeply.

"A-are you all right!?" Itsuwa asked from nearby.

There was a drop of blood running down from her temple. Apparently, she hadn't been able to get through the mass of people unscathed either. She did have her spear in her bag, but she must not have wanted to swing it around here.

Kamijou started running out of the crowd of people while breathing heavily. His feet were wobbling and he felt a little shaky. He had to pay attention so he didn't bump into the stone walls on the sides of the small road.

"…I-Itsuwa. Where is the Palace of the Popes?"

"It's up ahead. That's its roof you can see over there. …We have to get through there next."

Kamijou slowly looked over in the direction Itsuwa was pointing.

What he saw there was a large riot that made the one they had just gotten through look like nothing in comparison.

Part 5

The path to the Palace of the Popes was impassable.

Kamijou and Itsuwa were in the small old town of Avignon that was surrounded by only 4 kilometers of castle wall, but they still couldn't reach a certain spot. The streets in the old town were small. They were only about 3 meters wide and were surrounded on either side by stone housing complexes towering up 15 meters high making it difficult to take detours. And to go ahead, they had to go through a solid wall of hundreds if not thousands of rioters. It was like trying to move from one end of a packed train to the other.

At this rate they would never make it to the Palace of the Popes.

They would be taken out here before they had a chance to destroy the C-Document.

"Not again…" Itsuwa said as she caught her breath and stared at the new group of rioters ahead of them.

Some of the rioting men with bloodshot eyes were pointing and yelling at them. Kamijou didn't know French, but they may have been yelling, "They're Japanese!", or "They're from Academy City!", or something similar.

Before they could move, Itsuwa grabbed Kamijou's arm and started running.

"This isn't going to work. Come on. This is just going to end in a stalemate!"

"Hey, what about the Palace of the Popes!?" Kamijou yelled as Itsuwa led him back the way they had come.

It looked like the men who had been glaring at Kamijou and Itsuwa started following them, but they got pulled back into the huge mass of rioters.

Itsuwa didn't like the situation any more than Kamijou.

"…That group of rioters was clearly the biggest one yet. We're not going to get through just by running!"

"So you're going to find another route? But…"

Kamijou started speaking, but he spotted some youths who were taking part in another riot ahead. The small path was completely blocked by a wall of people.

It wasn't too surprising. Kamijou and Itsuwa had just pushed through that group of rioters.

"Here too!?"

Itsuwa's voice sounded surprisingly pissed and she grabbed Kamijou's hand while running towards the housing complex making up the wall. They leaped into the stone building that almost looked like it was made out of a cliff.

They pushed the thick wooden door closed with their backs.

The sound and impact of the rioters going by on the other side pounded on the door. But it wasn't because someone was trying to destroy the door; it was just from the shoulders and arms of the rioters crammed into the road scraping against it.

Kamijou slid down to the ground while keeping his back on the door.

"…What do we do about this? At this rate, we'll never get to the Palace of the Popes."

"Making progress through these riots is difficult…" Itsuwa spoke in a quiet voice.

She lowered her bag to the ground and pulled out a few rods about 70 cm long. They came together into a single rod when she connected them using sockets that looked like gas valves. Lastly, Itsuwa connected a steel blade to the end.

It was a Western-style cross spear.

Kamijou thought it was called a Friuli Spear.

(Sigh…Well, I had thought a lot about this secret mission thing, but…)

As he was thinking, he saw something that made him choke.

He saw Itsuwa's cleavage that was visible due to the front of her blouse being tied closed in a makeshift fashion. Kamijou thought there were plenty of problems with how she was dressed, but she didn't seem to notice.

"What do we do now? I act so as to avoid the riots, so I don't actually have any plan or spells to use if I ever actually got caught in one."

"Y-yeah…We need to get to the Palace of the Popes in order to stop the riots and we need to stop the riots in order to get to the Palace of the Popes…Damn it. This is just going in circles."

And on top of all that, there was the fact that if the enemy felt any danger they would take the C-Document and return to the Vatican while Kamijou and Itsuwa were stuck here. If the C-Document was used there, it would be even more difficult to get it. And then these riots could last forever.

They had to act now, but they were stuck. It was quite a dilemma.

Each second that was wasted felt like tens if not hundreds of times longer.

But then…

Kamijou heard his cell phone ringing in his pocket.

It was from Tsuchimikado.

"Kami-yan, you okay!?"

"Where are you!? Are you caught up in the riots, too? Are you hurt!?"

"I'm en route to the building known as the Palace of the Popes. If the C-Document is really being used in France, it has to be there."

“The Palace of the Popes…? So you’re headed there, too?”

“?”

Kamijou continued before Tsuchimikado could respond.

“So my parachute didn’t end up somewhere way off target. We really were aiming for Avignon.”

“Well, yeah…Kami-yan, how do you know about the Palace of the Popes? I thought we jumped off the plane before I explained that.”

“I met up with Itsuwa of the Amakusas here and she explained it to me. But the riots are so intense we can’t reach the Palace. What about you?”

“It’s about the same here. Well, *a lot has happened*. These waves of people are working too well at blocking the small roads of Avignon. There’s no way we can get through like this.”

And with that, they both understood the other’s situation.

Tsuchimikado must have gotten caught up in the riots and was now hiding somewhere.

“Hey, Tsuchimikado. I’d like for us to meet up. Do you know a good place for that?”

“These riots are occurring all across the city. I’d rather not stay in one place for too long.”

“Then what are we going to do? Wait for the riots to die down?”

“That would be a good plan if these were occurring naturally, but these are being caused by the C-Document. The Roman Catholic Church can make this last as long as they need, so things aren’t going to change for the better with time.”

“But is there anything else we can do!?”

“Yes,” Tsuchimikado readily responded. “We need to change our way of thinking about this. If we can’t get to the Palace of the Popes, we just have to

solve the problem in a way where we don’t have to go to there.”

“…?”

“Since you had that Amakusa person explain it to you, I’m sure you know why we’re focusing on Avignon’s Palace of the Popes, right?”

Kamijou thought about that for a second.

“Well, they can operate devices in the Vatican from there, right? That’s why they can use the C-Document here.”

“Right. So we just have to sever the magical pipeline connecting Avignon and the Papal State which is now the Vatican. If we do that, they shouldn’t be able to use the C-Document anymore. It may be too difficult to get to the Palace, but we should be able to get to the pipeline.”

“Oh,” Kamijou responded.

(Now that I think about it, that’s true…)

“But surely the people using the C-Document in the Palace will notice if they can’t use it anymore. Once that happens, they’ll flee.”

“True enough. I can’t deny that. That’s why our schedule is important. This will all rely on whether we can get to the Palace after we sever the pipeline.”

Kamijou thought that Tsuchimikado’s plan made sense.

He must have been gathering information on this well before they had gotten on the plane. And he must have continued to investigate while being chased by the rioters after they had gotten separated.

But Kamijou, an amateur, spotted a problem in the plan.

“Even if we know the C-Document is in the Palace of the Popes, we don’t know who’s using it. Couldn’t they just hide within the crowd of rioters? We’d never find them then.”

“…”

Tsuchimikado stayed silent for a moment before he started speaking.

“Well, *we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.* Stopping the C-Document comes first.”

Kamijou had a bad feeling about Tsuchimikado’s words.

(He isn’t going to use magic to find the enemy’s location again, is he?)

Tsuchimikado Motoharu had a major handicap in that he injured himself whenever he used magic.

But Kamijou knew he would ignore that handicap and use magic if he had to. He had tracked down Oriana Thomson during the Daihaseisai even when he was covered in blood.

Whether he was aware of the unease Kamijou was feeling or not, Tsuchimikado continued speaking.

“Now we finally know what exactly needs to be done, Kami-yan.”

Part 6

Kamijou and Itsuwa cut through the housing complex and went out through the back door.

“Itsuwa, are the other Amakusas not able to come yet?”

“S-sorry. I didn’t think anything like this would happen. I contacted them earlier, but they’ll be here by tomorrow morning at the earliest. If only we were in Japan where we could use the ‘vortexes’ of the transportation spell ‘Miniature Pilgrimage’…”

The path they were on was devoid of rioters and it almost looked like they could have made it all the way to Palace of the Popes without incident.

But they had no idea when a crowd of rioters would block their path and it was better not to walk long distances. It seemed Tsuchimikado was right about changing their target to the closer pipeline.

“Th-this way.”

Itsuwa was showing Kamijou the way while holding her spear.

He thought the “walls” on either side looked even taller than usual, and on closer inspection there were stone buildings built on top of the normal ones here. Because the buildings looked almost like fortifications and their walls were stained black making them look like some kind of bulwark, it was hard to tell what kind of buildings they were at first glance. The houses, shops, and churches all looked like fortresses on the outside.

“Um, I know where the place Tsuchimikado-san mentioned is…but is the pipeline connecting to the Vatican really there?”

“Don’t ask me…” Kamijou muttered as he looked at his phone.

Tsuchimikado’s voice sounded cheerful.

“Well, the method of reading leylines is pretty different between cultures, but I’m fairly sure about this.”

Apparently, the point they were headed for was near Kamijou and Itsuwa. Since it was a fair distance from Tsuchimikado, he was leaving the severing of the pipeline to them.

“Hey, what does this pipeline look like? It doesn’t stick up from the ground or anything, right?”

“A leyline is a current of power through the earth. The types of power and the directions it flows in can be quite different, though. It isn’t uncommon for a power that is crucial to a certain sect to be completely meaningless to another. That’s why the method of reading them is so different between cultures.”

Kamijou tilted his head to the side in confusion at the voice coming from the speaker and Itsuwa explained that it was a bit like the use of ingredients in the foods of different cultures.

The black ham used in Western cooking was completely ignored in Japanese cooking (recent innovations notwithstanding). In a similar fashion, sensing and drawing out the needed type of power from all the different types was the key to using leylines.

As Itsuwa smoothly explained all this, Kamijou surmised that she may specialize in Amakusa-type leyline spells.

“Y’see, Kami-yan. There are no parts of the Earth that are necessarily better than other parts. It’s us humans that put value on it like that.”

“So an amateur like me wouldn’t be able to tell it’s there, huh.”

“Anyway, a leyline important to the Roman Catholic Church is connecting Avignon and the Vatican. But it’s a distorted line that was created by people destroying and rebuilding the terrain,” Tsuchimikado explained. “Leylines are fairly easily moved. In fact, that’s the whole idea behind feng shui.”

“Sigh. I don’t really get this whole leyline thing, but is it a line directly carved in the earth?”

“As I said, by destroying the terrain, you can alter the leyline. The trick to telling between good land and bad land in feng shui is based on where there are mountains, what direction rivers are flowing in, and things like that. And nowadays, filling in rivers and destroying mountains isn’t that rare of an occurrence.”

“Magicians that use the earth have to work to make sure that important magical points aren’t destroyed like that,” Itsuwa added.

(…That sounds like a pain in the ass.)

“But you can also change the terrain in a calculated way. It’s a bit like choosing which type of leyline you want to make stronger out of all the different types in the area. But if you screw up, balance can be lost and that can be disastrous. Because of that, it can only realistically be done as a huge project on a national

level.”

“So that’s how the Roman Catholic Church’s pipeline was made…”

“As I said, there are many different types of power flowing through the earth in many different directions. That’s why it can be hard to find a specific line if you have no hint to go on.” Tsuchimikado spoke smoothly. “But if I know I’m looking for a line that connects the Palace of the Popes and the Vatican, I have some criteria to search with. It’s like having a car navigation system leading you there. Anyway, if you can just destroy that pipeline, it would be a huge help. Um, Itsuwa, was it?”

“Y-yes!!”

“Just to make sure. You know the method and spell to destroy the pipeline, right?”

“U-um…I follow the Amakusa style, so I know all the standard spells of Shinto, Buddhism, and the Christianity…”

“That’ll be enough. You take care of it as soon as you spot the pipeline.”

Kamijou was merely confused by their exchange.

“Wait. Can’t I just take out the leyline or pipeline or whatever with my right hand?”

He had a power known as Imagine Breaker.

He could destroy any supernatural power whether it was magical or psychic in nature.

But Tsuchimikado disagreed with Kamijou’s view.

“I’m not so sure your Imagine Breaker can negate leylines, Kami-yan.”

“Eh?” Kamijou looked shocked. “But leylines are…um…magical…right? So…”

“Yes, but…” Tsuchimikado interrupted him. “I just can’t figure out what your right hand really is. You say it can negate any magic or psychic power. But take

an occult power like a human's 'life force' for instance. You can't kill someone just by giving them a handshake, right?"

"Well, no…"

"I get the feeling there are some odd 'exceptions'. And leylines are most likely one of those exceptions. I highly doubt you can obliterate the entire Earth just by touching the ground."

But at the same time Misha Kreutzev avoided being touched by Kamijou's right hand and Kazakiri Hyouka was subconsciously afraid of it.

"…"

Kamijou silently stared at his right hand.

(Exceptions…? How does that work?)

When he thought about it calmly, Kamijou realized that he didn't know any details about how his power worked. It may have been because he had lost his memories, but he may not have known before losing his memories either. At the very least, none of the "knowledge" left after he had lost his memories contained any hint he could find an answer in.

But right now severing that pipeline took precedence.

He pulled himself together and looked ahead.

Part 7

Kamijou and Itsuwa made their way to a small museum in Avignon.

It wasn’t a large building solely used as a museum. Just like the housing complexes and stores, it used one portion of the fortress-like buildings towering above the roads on either side. There just wasn’t enough room in the old town of Avignon that was surrounded by the castle walls and they had probably wanted to maintain a sense of unity in the scenery.

There was a sign in French on the main entrance, but the wooden door had a metal shutter down in front of it. The plate hanging from the knob most likely said “closed”.

It was midday on a weekday.

“They must have closed early in fear of the riots,” Itsuwa said while looking up at the building.

Kamijou stared at the solid looking shutter and spoke.

“But Tsuchimikado said the invisible pipeline runs through this museum, right? We have to get in somehow. Is there some Amakusa lock-picking skill or-..?”

“Eyah!”

Kamijou was cut off by a cute yell.

The tip of Itsuwa’s spear stuck into the gap between the shutter and the ground and she moved the spear according to the principle of leverage. The very gears that moved the shutter broke with a crunching sound.

Itsuwa ignored the security alarm that began ringing and lifted the shutter higher. Then she broke the wooden door using leverage as well.

She entered the building with a sleek expression on her face.

“C’mon, hurry.”

“Um…Itsuwa-san?”

Kamijou stared at the short girl’s face in shock.

His eyes seemed to be saying “And I thought you were just a normal girl…”, but

her expression didn’t change. She must have been preparing to beat down any museum employees who might come to see what was going on.

As the security alarm continued to ring, Kamijou entered the building, too.

The lighting was fairly dim. In fact, it was almost completely dark inside. All of the windows were covered so the exhibits wouldn’t receive any direct sunlight. With the normal fluorescent lights, it wouldn’t have been a problem, but Kamijou was a bit unsure of his footing with only the faint light from the emergency exit sign.

“Tsuchimikado said it was…”

“I can tell where it is now that we’re this close. It’s this way.”

Itsuwa continued deeper into the museum holding her spear in one hand.

Kamijou followed her and found nothing more than a normal floor. But looking at the arrangement of the glass showcases, the usual pattern was ignored here which left it oddly empty.

Itsuwa slowly circled around the oddly empty floor. She looked around for a bit and then nodded in satisfaction.

“Yes, it’s here. I can feel a power manufactured by the Roman Catholic Church. It feels like a type of purified power that is used in the spells of some other sects. This is a leyline characteristic of a Western church society. They did an excellent job of concealing it; it’s hard to sense until you’re almost right next to it.” She spoke while looking towards Kamijou. “…Tsuchimikado-san isn’t here yet, but I should take care of it before the enemy notices. I’m going to sever the pipeline, so please stand back.”

“I don’t see anything here,” Kamijou said as he stared at the floor next to Itsuwa. “…And is severing a pipeline such an easy thing to do?”

“Well, completely severing a leyline requires a large number of people.”

“Ah ha ha.” Itsuwa laughed. “But if we just need to make the line connecting the Palace of the Popes and the Vatican unusable, I can do it. Basically, I’m going to damage it which will cause its direction to be slightly shifted.”

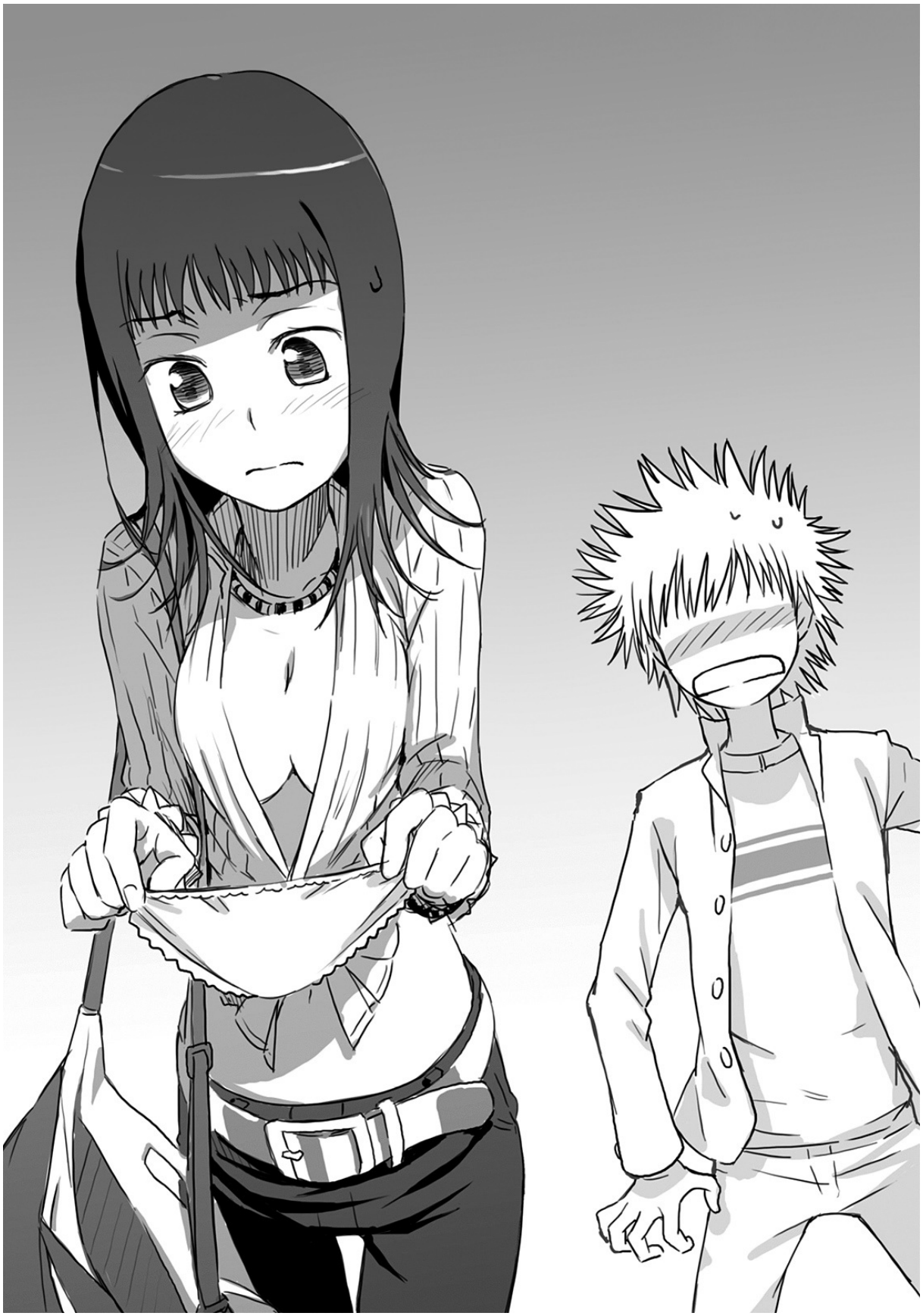
“I see…” Kamijou nodded even though he didn’t really understand.

He didn’t want to mess it up with Imagine Breaker, so he moved a bit away from Itsuwa.

The Amakusa girl put down her bag and rummaged around inside it. It seemed she was choosing the everyday items needed to use this spell.

Kamijou asked a question as he watched her.

“So the Amakusa Church uses things like that to create spells?”



“Y-yes. For this spell I need a camera, a slipper, a pamphlet, some mineral water, and white panties…”

As she took them out, Itsuwa screamed and hurriedly stuck them back in her bag. They were most likely the ones she had changed out of before.

Her face turned red and she stopped moving.

“Wh-what’s wrong, Itsuwa?”

“…this spell.”

Itsuwa spoke while still not moving.

“I need them to complete this spell…”

All hope left her face and she slowly took the panties back out from her bag. Itsuwa looked like she was about to cry, and Kamijou thought about turning around, but he couldn’t get himself to move after she told him not to worry about it.

Itsuwa lined up the objects she had taken out of her bag on the floor. To Kamijou it just looked like a circle, but there must have been subtle rules about how to do it that she was following.

When she had finished arranging the objects, she spun her spear around in her hand so that the tip was pointed down.

“Here goes,” Itsuwa said as she stabbed down towards the floor with her spear.

It hit the very center of the circle.

There was no sound of blade hitting stone.

The tip of the spear disappeared into the floor like it was sinking into mud.

(Once Itsuwa severs the pipeline, the C-Document will stop working. In other words, the riots taking place here should calm down.)

The Amakusa girl mumbled something while her spear was stabbed into the

floor.

The spear ever so slowly sank deeper into the floor.

(But then the people using the C-Document in the Palace of the Popes will realize they've failed. When they've determined that the situation is no longer in their favor, they may flee to the Vatican with the C-Document.)

She tapped the floor with her heel.

She also lightly but rhythmically tapped the handle of the spear with the pointer finger of the hand holding the spear.

(So this is a race against the clock. We need to rush to the Palace of the Popes once the riots settle down. We'll join up with Tsuchimikado and stop them before they can leave.)

The spear was now over halfway into the floor and the end of the handle only reached up as high as Itsuwa's chest.

She let go of the spear and adjusted her grip.

It was like she was turning a giant key.

Next, there was a noise.

But…

It wasn't a noise caused by Itsuwa's spear.

With a loud crash, the outer wall of the museum suddenly burst open from some kind of attack. It was aimed for Itsuwa and her spear that was sunk into the floor.

It looked like a giant blade being swung.

It was white.

It traveled in a straight line for Itsuwa.

When she noticed that, she altered her position without moving the spear so that she was behind it. The attack passed right by Itsuwa, but a piece of the destroyed

wall…or rather, a piece of stone too big to reach your arms around, hit her spear dead on.

“Itsuwa!!”

The spear broke clean in half where it was hit.

Itsuwa was knocked back a fair distance while holding the broken spear.

After causing this destruction, the white attack fluctuated and disappeared like smoke.

“Damn it…!!”

Itsuwa held the two halves of her broken spear in her hands. She removed the broken piece from the attachments and threw it aside. She then kicked her bag up from the ground and grabbed a replacement rod from the bag in midair. She used that piece to remake her spear.

The second attack came shortly thereafter.

The “white blade” came bursting through the outer wall again.

The motion of the “white blade” as it moved from one wall to the other was rough like kid swinging a tree branch around. But this had overwhelming destructive force. The stone walls and floor crumbled, the glass showcases shattered, and the pieces scattered in every direction.

The sounds of destruction continued one after another.

Kamijou bent over and saw a fine powder falling down from the ceiling.

(Not good…This building isn’t going to last…!!)

“Itsuwa!!” Kamijou yelled and moved his arms to tell her to run for the exit.

Meanwhile the “white blade” continued to fly around destroying the walls like a predator chasing its prey.

With each strike, it seemed to be getting closer and closer to its target.

Whoever was controlling it may have been getting a feel for how they were avoiding it.

Or perhaps the attacker was attacking from a distance and he or she was getting slowly closer.

Kamijou barely managed to avoid the blade as it fell like a guillotine. He leaped out of the way and out of the museum in what was almost a roll.

And then…

“My, my. It seems when attacking from a distance my accuracy drops.”

The voice came from nearby.

Quite nearby. It was only a few dozen centimeters away from his face.

Kamijou was surprised as the man must have been waiting for him there.

The man in front of Kamijou’s eyes swung his right arm without waiting for Kamijou to respond.

Something white appeared behind his arm as it moved.

Unlike the slow movement of the man’s arm, the white object shot towards Kamijou’s neck at the speed of a falling guillotine.

There was a loud roar as it flew through the air.

“Ohhhhhhh!?”

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand and the “white blade” hit it.

The “white blade” fell to pieces the very second it did. Literally. A white powder really did scatter around the area.

The fog-like curtain of powder fluctuated and gathered back together when the attacker moved his finger.

“Get back!!” Itsuwa yelled from behind Kamijou and he hurriedly put some distance between himself and the attacker.

Kamijou was finally able to focus on all of the attacker at once.

It was a man wearing green ceremonial clothes.

He was wearing green from head to toe.

He was a bit short for a white person as he was about Kamijou's height or maybe a little shorter. On the other hand, he looked about twice Kamijou's age. He was quite skinny so his ceremonial clothes were very loose fitting. His sunken cheeks gave him an odd sense of vitality.

Kamijou held out his right hand and asked the ceremonially-dressed attacker a question.

"…Are you from the Roman Catholic Church?"

"I am, but I would prefer it if you said I was from God's Right Seat."

Kamijou was at a loss for words at how carefree the man's response was.

God's Right Seat.

Another member of that group, Vento of the Front, had almost completely paralyzed Academy City single-handedly on September 30th.

If this man was on the same level as her…

"My name is Terra of the Left."

The white powder gathered in his hand took shape.

As before, it was the shape of a guillotine.

It was a board-shaped blade that looked like a 70 centimeter square that had had its bottom cut diagonally. The man held it by the ring that would normally have the supporting rope tied to it.

"It seems my turn is finally here. Since we of God's Right Seat cannot use normal magic, I had to leave the operation of the C-Document to another magician."

Terra smiled as he let the execution blade hang casually by his side.

“And so I was hoping you could help me kill some time. You’re the first ones to get caught by my anti-leyline spell probe, so I hope you’ll be good for some fun.”

Part 8

Kamijou, Itsuwa, and Terra stood in front of the destroyed outer wall of the museum. The dust was lowering visibility, so they tried to wave it away.

Then Terra of the Left swung his right hand.

He swung it from left to right.

Matching that movement, the white guillotine moved. It was less like he was holding it and more like it was floating in the air while connected to his arm. The form of the guillotine that had been a meter across just a moment ago collapsed. It turned into a white tsunami that shot out in a horizontal line.

It roared through the air.

“Ohhhh!?”

Kamijou held up his right hand.

Whirling destruction followed the blade. The streets in the old town of Avignon were small. It gouged into the cliff-like buildings on side, blew away parked cars, and knocked entire buildings crooked.

There was now a clear distinction between the pristine old street to Kamijou’s right and the pile of rubble to his left.

The white guillotine was very destructive and it would easily slice right through a person, but…

(I can deal with it using my right hand!!)

“Itsuwa!” Kamijou yelled, but he started running towards Terra without waiting for her to respond.

He would draw Terra’s attack and Itsuwa would get in range to attack him. That was the best attack pattern for this situation.

And Terra seemed focused on Kamijou’s right hand.

His sickly-looking eyes narrowed and he spoke in a voice that showed admiration.

“You should have been killed by that strike. I see. So this is Imagine Breaker. …I had heard that you beat down Vento of the Front.”

Terra swung the guillotine while grinning.

He swung it from back to front.

Matching that movement, the white blade tapered off like a screw and shot in a pointed strike straight for Kamijou’s chest.

“…!!”

Kamijou somehow managed to get his right hand up to hit it, but he was so focused on defense he was having trouble moving his feet quickly enough.

Whoosh.

Itsuwa ran by Kamijou’s side holding her spear while crouching slightly.

“Hmph.”

Terra’s guillotine headed towards her.

A loud noise entered Kamijou’s ears. Itsuwa had ducked under the white blade flying in a straight line. But she didn’t stop moving there. She evaded the blade a

second and third time, held up her Friuli Spear, and leaped for Terra's chest.

She pulled the spear back and powerfully stabbed it forwards.

Terra repelled the spear with a horizontal swing of the guillotine.

He then swung the guillotine horizontally in the opposite direction. This time he was aiming for Itsuwa.

It was something like a counter for that large blade.

"!!"

Itsuwa didn't try to stop the blade; she leapt forward diagonally and continued forward to avoid it. As she did so, she pulled the spear back to build up power and struck forward.

It may have been because she had to dodge the blade, but she lost her balance and there was a slight lag to her attack.

Terra used that time to swing the guillotine again.

It looked like Terra's white blade would reach Itsuwa before her spear reached him.

But there was a small glint of light next to Terra's face.

He then noticed lines of light crossing in front of his eyes and several straight lines of light spreading out like a spider web around him.

"Sorry about this…" Itsuwa spoke these words as a straining sound could be heard.

The sound of something being strained to its limit was coming from…

"The Seven Blades of the Seven Teachings!!"

Wires.

With the sound of the air being sliced, the wires rushed in towards Terra at an amazing speed. The superfine blades attacked at once from 7 different directions

and were set to cut him at several places from his ankles to his heart.

Terra did not have time to avoid them.

Kamijou thought they might be moving faster than a bullet.

But…

“Precedence.”

Terra’s expression did not change.

He merely muttered that one word. The 7 wires headed for his body did not cut him to pieces; they merely coiled around him without even breaking the skin as if they were nothing but fishing line.

Itsuwa’s expression turned to one of shock.

Terra lightly swung his right arm and the 7 wires wrapped around his skin ripped to pieces like they were a spider web.

“!!”

Itsuwa exhaled sharply and stabbed forward with her spear that had been pulled back.

The sharp tip stabbed towards Terra’s shoulder at lightning speed.

“Precedence: Outer Wall – Lower, Human Body – Higher.”

But then Terra muttered those words.

He disappeared into the wall behind him as if he was entering an invisible entrance.

“!?”

Itsuwa’s spear struck the wall and a high-pitched sound rang out.

As the shock ran up her arm, Itsuwa grimaced.

And then…

“Precedence: Outer Wall – Lower, Movements of a Blade – Higher.”

The white guillotine crashed through the wall and attacked horizontally towards Itsuwa’s torso.

Itsuwa abandoned the idea of blocking it and practically fell to the ground avoiding the horizontal attack.

A few severed pieces of her hair floated in the air.

Meanwhile, Terra jumped out through the newly made hole in the wall.

He spotted Itsuwa shortly after her evasive action and casually swung the guillotine again.

As Itsuwa had her stomach pressed to the ground, she had no way of dodging it this time.

So Kamijou leaped over attempting to get between Itsuwa and Terra.

“Ooooaaahh!?”

He just barely managed to destroy the giant blade with his right hand as it swung down towards Itsuwa’s neck.

The guillotine exploded and white dust scattered about the area.

Terra’s expression did not change.

He did not seem worried in the slightest.

“Precedence: Outer Wall – Lower, Movements of a Blade – Higher.”

Terra spoke the same words again and he casually thrust the now re-gathered white blade towards the side wall.

The guillotine swung across the outer wall like an arm knocking things off of a shelf.

The outer wall collapsed and dozens of stones the size of melons flew through the air.

“!!”

While Itsuwa tried stand up, Kamijou grabbed her arm and pulled her backwards. Building materials crushed the area they were moments ago.

Instead of chasing after them, Terra leisurely walked over the rubble in their direction.

“I’d heard about the Imagine Breaker before, so I was anticipating quite a bit.” Terra smiled while the white blade of unknown properties hung from his right hand. “But from the looks of things, you’re nothing much. To be honest, I’m a bit disappointed, I wish I’d never seen this. You apparently won your battle with Vento, but that was merely caused by your destroying her ‘Divine Punishment’ and Academy City's using that ‘fallen angel’ with the ‘pressure of the realm’ to constrict her. If she were at full power, she would not have had any trouble with you.”

(This is…)

Kamijou felt a chill down his spine as he realized something.

A man who was on the same level as Vento would not attack with just a blade.

(He’s a part of God’s Right Seat…!!)

Kamijou subconsciously gritted his teeth, but he doubted Terra was just going to wait for him to calm down.

“My my, what’s wrong?” Terra smiled and lifted up the sinister guillotine. “Surely you don’t think you can defeat me by keeping your distance. At least allow me to enjoy this a little more. If this is all you’ve got, I don’t even need to make any ‘adjustments’.”

“Kh!!”

Kamijou and Itsuwa dragged their heavy bodies forward and simultaneously attacked Terra.

Terra held the guillotine forward in his right hand and spoke.

“Precedence: Movements of a Spear – Lower, Air – Higher.”

And with that, Itsuwa’s motion suddenly stopped.

The tip of her blade that had been headed for Terra’s throat was stopped as if it were obstructed by a wall of air.

As Kamijou saw this happening from side, he clenched his right fist and swung it at Terra’s chest.

Terra was faster.

He casually swung his hand horizontally and the white blade followed suit. The giant blade evaded past Kamijou’s right hand and lunged at his body.

(Oh, shi-!?)

He lacked the time to even finish the thought.

The blade's width was thicker than his thumb. He felt it press up against his skin and dig in. Pain exploded about him.

Kamijou’s body doubled over from the force of the guillotine and he was launched into the side wall.

Shortly after he heard a loud thud, he heard a painful cracking noise from his body.

(…!?)

He was unable to speak. The force that was pinning his stomach and back had left him breathless.

“Gha…!?”

However, that was the extent of his injuries. Kamijou’s was not sliced in two like the outer walls.

He punched the guillotine pushing him against the wall with a shaking fist. The

giant blade burst into powder and Kamijou sat on the ground, attempting to gain control of his erratic breathing.

"…"

Terra stared with great interest at his destroyed guillotine. He took a step back and lightly moved his fingers, calling the powder to return to him.

(I'm… alive…?) Kamijou thought as he rubbed his stomach that stung with dull pain. (That hit me, but I'm still alive…?)

Terra's first surprise attack had easily broken through the outer wall of the museum. Kamijou had been hit by the same attack, so his body should be crushed or splattered.

Which meant…

(That and this one were different types…?)

Kamijou moved his gaze from his stomach to Terra.

Terra still seemed uninterested as he stood in front of the destroyed museum.

(Does something amplify the destructive power? Is there some trick to the sword?)

There was one thing that stood out as suspicious.

Kamijou stared at Terra as the latter checked to make sure his guillotine was in working order after it had been negated.

"'Precedence…'" Itsuwa mumbled as she changed position to cover Kamijou as she pulled on her spear that simply refused to reach Terra.

She then noticed the powder stuck on the tip of her spear.

"…Flour?"

She thought for a moment and her body stiffened as shock appeared on her face

"Does that weapon function using the 'Flesh of God…?'"

“Oh, so even an Asian can figure that out.”

Itsuwa was nearly speechless as Terra attempted to provoke Itsuwa.

“During mass, wine is treated as the ‘Blood of God’ and the bread is treated as the ‘Flesh of God’. And I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that the event of mass is modeled after the execution of the Son of God on the cross.”

Itsuwa bit her lip upon Terra’s words.

Kamijou had no way of knowing, but those words were quite destructive to someone knowledgeable in magic.

“When you calmly think about the fact that the Son of God was crucified on the cross, you will realize that a normal human wouldn’t normally be able to kill the Son of God. That’d be quite a tall order even for me. At certain times in the scriptures, the ‘order of precedence’ is changed. For instance, in order for the Son of God to take on all of humanity’s ‘original sin’, the natural precedence had to be changed so that he could be killed by a normal human.”

The guillotine started to crumble.

Despite the fact that Kamijou was raising his guard, Terra seemed to enjoying himself more and more.

“One of the secret ceremonies required to complete the story of the Son of God is the alteration of the order of precedence. And it is that very spell that I use. It is called the ‘Execution of Light’. The ability to freely alter the shape of the flour, which used as the medium, into an edged tool shape is like a byproduct of that. Do you understand now?”

This basically meant that if “Terra’s body” was given precedence over the “wires”, his body would remain unscathed. If the “blade made of flour” was given precedence over the “outer wall”, the blade was able to destroy the walls with ease. If the “air” was given precedence over the “spear”, Itsuwa’s attack would stop in midair.

“Strength and weakness mean nothing before me. I can just alter the order of the two after all.”

This was the power of God's Right Seat.

Vento of the Front wielded a power that dealt with God, "Divine Punishment", and had used it to paralyze Academy City.

This time it was the execution of the Son of God.

All magicians dealt with theories and laws Kamijou knew nothing about, but he had a feeling the ones God's Right Seat dealt with were something special.

"Hm, but what to do now? I may have revealed my trick, but that doesn't mean this is over. Don't tell me you thought it ended when you solved the mystery."

Kamijou strongly clenched his right fist at Terra's words.

He was right.

They knew how it worked, but they had no way of dealing with it.

That was why Terra had been able to reveal his secret to them while remaining confident.

"Perhaps I'll give you some time," Terra said in a teasing way. "Stretching out this battle doesn't harm me any. I'll give you 10 seconds. In that time, you can come up with a plan to defeat me or a plan to flee. …But don't be mistaken. I'm not saying any such plans actually exist, okay?"

Terra seemed to be enjoying himself more and more as he spoke.

"Fuck," Kamijou cursed.

There wasn't that much space between them and Terra of the Left.

Kamijou gritted his teeth and Terra seemed to be enjoying every single reaction Kamijou gave.

But then…

"Oh, how generous. I can come up with 3 different plans given 10 seconds."

Kamijou suddenly heard a male voice he knew well coming from outside his

range of vision.

Before he got a chance to look over, a red bullet shot through the air. It was a burning orange piece of origami. The folded square scrap of paper flew towards Terra's face with enough force to crack concrete.

Terra merely followed it with his eyes.

"Precedence: Magic – Lower, Human Skin – Higher."

It struck. But just as the origami touched Terra's skin, it suddenly changed directions and struck the wall right next to Itsuwa. It was like a bullet ricocheting off of a metal wall.

Kamijou finally turned to look at the intruder.

A boy wearing blue sunglasses was standing there.

Because he had forced himself to use magic, he had a trail of blood coming from his lips.

"Tsuchimikado…!?"

Tsuchimikado gave a slight nod in response.

His gaze never left Terra.

"Don't tell me," Terra smiled slightly as the guillotine hung from his right hand, "that was one of your plans."

"Unfortunately for you…" Tsuchimikado smiled, too. His attack seemed to have been a dud, but he didn't seem even slightly worried. "I have you cornered now."

"…?"

"And it'll be checkmate next. I've proved my theory to be correct."

What he pulled out as he said this was not a magical item.

It was shining black handgun.

The very same handgun he had shot Oyafune Monaka with.

“Do you really think you can defeat me with a toy like that?”

Tsuchimikado gave no response.

He gathered strength in the finger on the trigger.

Terra made no attempt to find cover; he merely stood and slowly spoke.

“Precedence: Bullet – Lower, Human Skin – Higher.”

“Precedence: Bullet – Lower, Human Skin – Higher.”

Tsuchimikado spoke in unison with Terra.

The sound of multiple gunshots rang out.

But the lead bullets ricocheted off of Terra’s face and chest.

It was an overwhelmingly one-sided result.

But even so, a smile remained on Tsuchimikado’s lips.

“I told you, Terra of the Left.”

Tsuchimikado held the handgun in one hand and put his other hand in his pocket.

He pulled out a black piece of origami.

“I told it would be checkmate this time.”

“…”

Terra of the Left was silent after hearing Tsuchimikado’s words.

He then slowly turned towards Tsuchimikado and prepared his guillotine.

The streets were supposed to be full of rioters, but the area seemed oddly silent.

(Move…) Kamijou thought.

For better or for worse, a major change was about to occur in his battle.

Kamijou was completely caught up in the confrontation between Tsuchimikado and Terra, so he hadn't notice Itsuwa drawing near. She whispered in his ear.

"(Um, we need to take advantage of Tsuchimikado's next action and flee.)"

"Eh?"

"(…He told us to in his instructions. He said stopping the C-Document in the Palace of the Popes is more important than defeating the enemy here.)"

Itsuwa was holding a piece of origami.

Tsuchimikado's instructions must have been written on it. Kamijou didn't know exactly when, but he must have thrown it to Itsuwa while talking with Terra.

Tsuchimikado and Terra each took a slow step towards each other.

And just when Kamijou thought they were going to strike, a noise erupted that was so loud he thought his eardrums were going to burst.

(…!?)

This was not the sound of magic.

It was the sound of the townscape of Avignon being destroyed by explosives.

Of course, neither Tsuchimikado nor Terra had caused it.

A third party was interfering.

Proof of this could be seen in how both of them clicked their tongues in annoyance and how each stepped back to put some distance between himself and the other.

Kamijou was surprised by this sudden occurrence and watched as the housing complexes towering above either side of the road began crumbling. This created a gray dust that obscured Kamijou's vision.

He could see the silhouettes of the source of the explosions on the other side.

But these were not human silhouettes.

“…What’s going on? What the hell is going on!?” he mumbled.

The warped silhouettes on the other side of the gray curtain were moving.

Part 9

Academy City's unofficially formed armored unit began invading the old city of Avignon from outside its walls.

Their primary equipment was the HsPS-15, aka the "Large Weapon". It was a powered suit developed using all the best Academy City technology.

The powered suit was a new Academy City weapon that covered the body in armor that looked like a Western suit of armor. The joints were moved using electric power and the flesh-and-blood human inside was given mobility anywhere from twice normal to dozens of times normal.

They came in various standard sizes and levels of firepower, but the ones here were giant masses of metal 2.5 meters tall.

The suits had blue and gray camouflage on them and the robot-like "armor" had two arms and two legs and the arms had 5 fingers each. However, if you asked someone whether the powered suits were "human-like", you would be told "no". The "head" area was huge. It may have been because the chest armor was so thick, but it looked like the suits had one of the drum-shaped security robots on their heads. There was no neck. The "head" was directly connected to the chest, but it could still rotate.

There was a great sound of something hard being crushed.

It was the sound of the armored legs stepping on the rubble as they advanced.

The stone paving and the ruins of the bricks had both survived for hundreds of years, but they were so easily crushed now.

The hands of the powered suits held special guns that had barrels so wide they looked misshapen.

The guns looked like large rifles made by forcibly shortening the barrel of a tank's main gun, but they were actually quite different. They were anti-barrier revolver shotguns.

The shells used in those guns were special. Inside a single shell were a few dozen bullets that would usually be classified as anti-materiel. Each shot could blow straight through a tank and at close range a few shots could force open the door to a nuclear shelter. Usually, the barrel wouldn't hold up to the explosive

force of the gunpowder, but, by delicately controlling the type and arrangement of the gunpowder, the direction of the explosive force could be controlled so that the lowest possible amount of damage was given to the barrel and the greatest possible amount of destructive force was released.

The few dozen powered suits headed for the castle walls surrounding Avignon while holding this large weapon that had been developed for the purposes of breaking through the thick door of a shelter an enemy might be hiding inside.

“Commence invasion.”

A mere two words.

As that voice spoke, the anti-barrier shotguns fired. Each time the pump-action-like slide was pulled the revolver cylinder turned.

In an instant, the stone walls that had restricted people’s entrance and exit to and from the city for hundreds of years were blown away like they were made of paper.

The powered suits stepped over the rubble and entered the old city of Avignon.

The artificial legs moved much more smoothly than a real human’s would have.

They found the youths of Avignon who had been rioting shortly before.

Those youths were not enveloped in pure fear or pure rage. This had been so sudden that they had been unable to sort out their feelings. This left them shaking in a whirlpool of mixed emotions.

On the other hand, the response of the powered suits was completely uniform.

They moved the wide barrels of their anti-barrier shotguns that had blown through the castle walls in a single shot and aimed them directly at the flesh-and-blood humans before them.

A voice gave a short report to its companions over the radio.

“Enemy forces spotted.”

Part 10

Kamijou was dumbfounded when he saw the large number of powered suits blasting through walls as they walked through Avignon ignoring the complicated arrangement of small streets. One of the cliff-like buildings towering above was destroyed and he could see “them” on the other side of the rubble.

Those things should not be in the normal world.

No institution other than Academy City should have been able to develop powered suits of that level.

They had anti-barrier revolver shotguns in their hands.

They blasted through the buildings and cars in their paths and mercilessly turned their guns on the rioters that recklessly attempted to fight back.

The shotguns fired shells from those gun barrels that a human fist could easily fit inside.

People were easily mowed down as the shotguns fired.

But that most likely wasn’t done with live ammunition. Kamijou didn’t know how it worked, but it seemed the anti-barrier revolver shotguns could use different types of shells. Perhaps the types of shells were divided between the even and odd chambers in the revolving cylinder, and it rotated two chambers at a time. That way, it could be changed between odd mode and even mode.

They were shooting blanks.

But the shock wave from the great explosion this caused was enough to knock

the oxygen from a person's lungs and knock them to the ground. When the first line of vigorous rioters was silenced, the second and third lines of approaching rioters paled and started running about in panic.

The powered suits didn't let them go.

The suits walked past the townspeople who were curled up shaking in the corners of the street and, if they showed any sign of resistance, the suits would mercilessly fire a blank in their direction knocking them back with a warhead of sound. While the rioters were rendered ineffective by this, the powered suits would connect their shotguns to a metal backpack-like part on their backs to automatically reload.

(…What's going on?)

The situation was so crazy Kamijou could do nothing but watch.

(Didn't Tsuchimikado say Academy City wasn't going to act? And now that they have…Why did it have to be like this!?)

Oyafune Monaka had said that the leaders of Academy City hadn't dared to deal with the problem in Avignon and were just going to let the chaos worsen.

Apparently the moment to act had come.

Now that the needed amount of damage had been done by the chaos, they were ending it all as if by flipping a switch.

Kamijou bit his lip.

The leaders of Academy City.

The board of directors.

And the one controlling them who was truly at the top of the science side.

"I see. So it's come to this." Terra said sounding amused.

And with those words, the atmosphere that was colored by shock was refocused on Terra.

Tsuchimikado held his handgun up as smoke came from the barrel and there was so much hostility coming from him that it felt like the hostility alone could pierce Terra.

“Well, the ones manipulating the C-Document in the Palace of the Popes are just normal magicians, so this really could end badly. I wish I could have gotten a bit more battlefield data for my precedence spell 'Execution of Light', though. Oh, well.”

As Terra spoke, he didn’t look towards Kamijou or the others and walked seemingly aimlessly through one of the large holes in one the housing complexes opened by the powered suits.

“Wait!!” Tsuchimikado yelled, but he jumped to the side directly afterwards.

Before Kamijou could figure why, a huge blast that probably came from an attack by one of the powered suits came from within the housing complex.

Kamijou’s tiny body was blown back in the blast.

The hole Terra had gone through was filled with flames.

“Ow…!?”

“A-are you all right!?”

Itsuwa frantically grabbed Kamijou’s hand.

Kamijou grabbed her hand to get up and Tsuchimikado called out to him.

“Can you move, Kami-yan? We need to get to the Palace of the Popes!!”

“Those powered suits are from Academy City, right!? I thought they weren’t going to move! This has gotten really damn complicated! Can we really just leave without stopping them!?”

“Going after Terra comes first!! And they’re after the C-Document, too. All this chaos might die down once that spiritual item is destroyed!!”

“Damn it. Do they really plan on stopping all this chaos?” Kamijou muttered in

annoyance.

In Avignon there were the rioters affected by the C-Document and the powered suits. Which side did he truly hate?

“C’mon, Kami-yan. That God’s Right Seat member may still be taking us too lightly, but with things the way they are, they really are going to flee. This is our only chance to destroy the C-Document!!”

“Fuck,” Kamijou swore.

At that time, a number of powered suits stepped into the narrow road out of the now flame-filled hole Terra had left through.

It should be fellow Academy City people inside of them, but the barrels of the weapons were squarely aimed their way.

Apparently, they weren’t taking the time to check what side everyone was on. They were just attacking everyone in the city of Avignon.

“…Kami-yan, let’s split up here. Itsuwa was it? You and Kami-yan head towards the Palace together.”

“Tsuchimikado?”

“It seems there are two problems here in Avignon. I thought we could just leave the powered suits alone for now, but that option is gone. Kami-yan, you chase down Terra and do something about the C-Document. I’ll stop these Academy City idiots.”

“But there’s…”

Kamijou was going to finish that with “no way you can do that”, but Tsuchimikado cut him off.

“They aren’t complete enemies. Sure, I’ll have to fight briefly, but I’ll be looking for a chance to talk with them. And I’m better at this kind of tactic than you.”

“…Damn it.”

“Go, Kami-yan!!”

“Damn it!!”

Kamijou ran along the narrow road with Itsuwa as he yelled. Behind him he heard the sound of the powered suits operating and (Tsuchimikado must have done something) a repeated sound of ice shattering. Kamijou gritted his teeth knowing that Tsuchimikado became covered in blood even when he used magic once, but he couldn’t do anything about it now.

He ran through the narrow streets of the old city of Avignon.

The scent of gunpowder and smoke filled his nose.

He saw fleeing people and powered suits chasing them down.

(What the hell is going on!?)

This made the demonstrations and riots look like nothing. As Kamijou watched the overwhelming violence of military action, Kamijou thought the blood vessels in his head were going to burst.

Itsuwa knew the location of the Palace of the Popes from her earlier investigation of Avignon. He looked in the direction she indicated and saw a silhouette he guessed had to be it in the distance.

Between the lines 3

Stiyl Magnus left the Tower of London.

The weather in London was reasonable, but the sightseers were few and far between. Unlike other countries, there weren’t large scale riots occurring in

England, but there was still a sense of tension spreading throughout the city.

“God’s Right Seat, huh…?” Stiyl mumbled as he put a new cigarette between his lips.

According to Lidvia Lorenzetti, there were only 4 members and they each held the attributes of one of the four archangels.

“What do you think about what she said?” Agnese Sanctis spoke out of boredom as she exited the building next to him. “Is any of it even true? I never heard about anything like that while I was with the Roman Catholic Church. It could just be a lie meant to disturb us.”

“I can’t deny that possibility, but everything said in the interrogation room is magically recorded. That’s what you’re writing on the parchment. If we reanalyze that, we should be able to figure out how accurate it is.”

“Of course, we can’t be 100% sure,” Stiyl added.

Stiyl thought as he spoke.

If Lidvia was telling the truth, “God’s Right Seat” was both the name of a group within the depths of the Roman Catholic Church and, at the same time, was the name of their final objective.

(…The seat on the right side. It almost seems like a hint, but I’m not sure. I can’t narrow it down enough yet. I guess I’ll have to talk with them some more.)

Stiyl looked at Agnese’s face.

“Maybe we should take a bit more of a break.”

“No, I want to get this over with.”

“I see,” Stiyl briefly responded.

They then went back into the dark Tower of London.

Chapter 4: A Collection of Steel that Blocks out the Sky. *Cruel_Troopers.*

Part 1

Kamijou and Itsuwa ran along the streets of Avignon.

The dreadful rioters were gone.

Most of them had been exterminated.

Parts of the road had been upturned and buildings and walls had collapsed, so the road was difficult to travel down. There were a lot of parked cars. As Kamijou ran towards the Palace of the Popes, the air smelled of smoke and gunpowder and he occasionally had to climb over rubble or duck through holes in walls.

There were powered suits in various places throughout the city.

Some were on the roads; some were on the roofs of buildings.

(If I'm able to spot this many while just running by, there must be hundreds or thousands of them in Avignon. Just what the hell is going on…?)

Kamijou clenched his teeth as he ran through a road that was submerged due to a broken water pipe and jumped over a toppled street light.

(It was the Roman Catholic Church that started this war. Academy City should be moving in an attempt to stop it. So why is this happening!?)

There was one thing this battlefield clearly lacked.

The smell of blood.

Since the powered suits' anti-barrier revolver shotguns used different types of shells, flesh-and-blood humans were only ever shot with blanks. But the gunshot created by the great amount of explosive used turned into a shock wave. This shell of sound was mercilessly mowing down the rioters in Avignon.

There were piles of unconscious rioters scattered around the city. And next to one, there were some powered suits inflating a giant balloon with a bulletproof fiber woven into it.

(Is that for reconnaissance…?)

Kamijou had seen something like that in an Academy City drama.

The balloon was equipped with a tiny camera and it moved around using heated air just like a hot-air balloon. Its main weakness was that the battery for the electric furnace that heated the air drained quickly, but it moved much more silently than one with a propeller and was both cheap and portable.

The one the powered suits were inflating was several times bigger than the one he had seen in the drama and it had a basket made of the same bulletproof fiber below it.

It was most likely going to be used similarly to a hot-air balloon. They would put the unconscious people on them and have them be automatically brought outside of the area of operation.

When Kamijou looked around again he noticed a number of black balloons floating in the air like dandelion seeds.

That was just how many people the powered suits had taken out.

"…"

They may have had the same idea as Tsuchimikado.

The rioters marching in the narrow streets of Avignon would be a hindrance to their mission. And the enemy using the C-Document could mix in with the rioters. So the best strategy was to quiet down the rioters first.

But…

“Tsuchimikado wouldn’t do it this way…”

“Eh?” Itsuwa turned her head toward Kamijou, but he didn’t respond.

As he ran, he looked at the exploded cars and tightly clenched his fist.

(Just because your actions take precedence is no reason to use violence to make the city yield to you!!)

Kamijou finally figured out what exactly Oyafune Monaka, one of the board of directors, had wanted to stop. It wasn’t that she had hated the Roman Catholic Church. And it wasn’t that she had wanted to defeat the enemy of Academy City. She had wanted to stop a situation such as this where things had devolved to a conflict where anything and everything was destroyed.

(I have to stop this.)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and ran through the city that was now a battlefield.

(I can’t just ignore this spiral of destruction. If anyone tries to justify this situation to me, I’ll destroy every last bit of that illusion of theirs!!)

“W-we’re there. That’s it…!!”

And so Kamijou and Itsuwa had reached the Palace of the Popes.

The name had led Kamijou to imagine a solemn church or a gaudy palace, but the actual building was less a palace and more a medieval fort. The giant building was a collection of stones from a quarry and it gave a feeling of rejection to those who looked at it.

The outer walls looking down on Kamijou were over 10 meters tall, but he looked surprised as soon as he saw the place.

“Holes…” Itsuwa muttered while carrying her spear in one hand.

The huge double doors of the main entrance had been blown inwards and walls around some of the windows on the higher floors had been destroyed. Someone

must have been inside because there were intermittent gunshots and explosions coming from within.

“It’s already started. Let’s go, Itsuwa!!”

“R-right!!”

Entering a building with gunshots coming from it wasn’t the best idea, but they had no choice.

Part 2

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was covered in blood.

It wasn’t because he had been shot by the powered suits. It was a side effect of the origami magic he had used in order to draw their attention elsewhere.

He had used the tiny opportunity from that to start running down a narrow road. He looked like he was about to fall over as he hid behind a parked car.

A number of gunshots rang through the air towards him.

Even though these gunshots were from blanks, the blasts of air were effective at suppressing the rioters. With one blast, the car’s windows shattered and the metal door bent in.

(Damn them…)

Tsuchimikado clicked his tongue as he pressed against the side of the car.

He wouldn’t die if he was hit, but he would pass out. And as he hid behind his shield, he heard a different thud.

He looked over in shock and saw that one of the powered suits had used its astounding jumping power to travel 10 meters through the air and was approaching from directly above him.

“Shit!!”

Tsuchimikado immediately jumped back and, at about the same instant, the giant powered suit landed on the car. The car was crushed beneath the great weight and exploded. The blast carried Tsuchimikado farther than he could have jumped otherwise.

As he rolled along the ground, the powered suit quietly aimed its anti-barrier shotgun at him while it was still surrounded by flames.

The area he was in simply had a line of cliff-like buildings on either side of the narrow street. Tsuchimikado tried to get behind a building at a street corner, but the powered suit was faster. The blast of air that came with the gunshot hit Tsuchimikado’s feet.

He fell as if he had been tripped.

Crawling, he somehow managed to get around the corner.

(Gh…Ahhhh!?)

When he looked at his ankle, it was badly bruised. Somehow the bone hadn’t been broken, but his movements were restricted nonetheless.

(It looked like there were 14 powered suits. Their armor looks thin, but they should be able to take an anti-tank missile straight on. Not to mention that…)

As he heard moving machinery from around the corner, Tsuchimikado pulled some first-aid medical tape out of his pocket and used it to wrap his ankle.

(They’re using the new drive correction device. That driver that studies the conditions of the battlefield and automatically regulates everything to bring out the greatest performance.)

When using the same weapons in a tropical rainforest or in Antarctica, its performance could change based on the environment. In a desert, you had to be

sure that sand didn’t get in and in wetlands you had to make sure mud didn’t get in.

The easiest way to maintain a weapon and the weapon’s characteristics differed depending on the region. But these powered suits were different. They scanned the environment around them and automatically corrected for it, so they could be used in their default settings anywhere in the world.

(I’m pretty sure the automatic correction information is transmitted amongst all of them during a mission. Ha ha. They probably know the best on how to walk through Avignon right now.)

For weapons with legs, balance was the biggest problem, but that weakness was not present with the powered suits. They could walk across crumbling ground even better than a real person could.

(Damn it. How am I supposed to attack…?)

Tsuchimikado Motoharu checked his taped ankle.

And by then, they were drawing near.

Part 3

The inside of the Palace of the Popes was vast.

But Kamijou felt that vastness gave it a feeling of lonely isolation. At the very least, there was nothing inside. The walls didn’t even have wallpaper; they were bare stone. Other than the evenly spaced pillars holding up the ceiling, nothing was there. It was like a pyramid after all the treasure had been removed.

(It looks like the Roman Catholic Church really didn't have any major force here. A select few wanted to use the C-Document without the rest of the church knowing. Or maybe Terra is acting alone using a personal squad.)

"It looks like no one's here…" Itsuwa said while holding her spear at the ready.

The site was open to sightseers on weekdays, but no one was sightseeing at a time like this. Before, Avignon had been afraid of the rioters and now the powered suits were rampaging around the area.

The gun shots and explosions continued.

If they were continuing, that meant that an actual battle was occurring instead of a one-sided suppression.

Terra was not the only magician in the city because someone had to be operating the C-Document. The powered suits were astounding, but those Roman Catholic magicians had to be something else to take them on directly like that.

As he didn't want to draw fire from either side, Kamijou was walking quietly.

"…Where exactly did those powered suits come from?"

"Eh?" Itsuwa looked over at Kamijou.

"Are there Academy City people piloting them? Or were they lent to an organization that cooperates with Academy City? And they can't exactly hide what they're doing here. What is Academy City thinking…?"

His cell phone had a television function.

Causing unnecessary noise was dangerous, but he needed information.

Kamijou checked to make sure no one was around, took out his phone, and tried to turn on the television function. However, nothing showed up. Perhaps it didn't work with foreign stations. He thought for a second and then brought up the recorded numbers. He called one of those numbers.

"Misaka!!"

“Wh-what?”

He had called Misaka Mikoto.

“Are you busy? There’s something I want to ask you.”

“O-oh, I see. Does it have to be me? Couldn’t you ask someone else? Like my mom maybe.”

“Hm? …Oh, I guess you’re right. I can just ask Misuzu-san or someone…”

“Non non non non!! I thought you called me because you had something to ask me!”

“??? Well, I guess someone in Academy City would be more helpful than Misuzu-san.”

Kamijou cocked his head to the side in confusion and got to the reason he had called.

“Misaka, can you check the news? It can just be from the internet. Can you see if the foreign news says anything about something happening in the city of Avignon?”

“Huh?” Misaka responded.

Perhaps his question had been a bit too sudden.

…Or so he thought. Apparently that wasn’t the case here.

“What are you talking about? If you just turn on any TV, you’ll find the special news report. Avignon is a French city, right? It seems some religious group is violating international law there by using some special kind of destructive weapon and an operation to clear them out has begun. There’s a huge uproar about it.”

“…What?”

Kamijou was completely shocked, and then Mikoto continued.

“They’re saying that normally the French government would take care of this,

but they needed some experts with access to special technology, so Academy City has gotten caught up in it all. …Actually, where are you? You would be hard pressed to find somewhere that didn't have this information yet."

"W-well…" Kamijou thought about how to explain this, but something distracted him.

He couldn't hear anything else.

The gunshots and other sounds from the nearby battle had stopped at some point. This was the natural state of the Palace of the Popes, but the silence almost hurt his hears.

(…)

Mikoto was saying something on the other end of the phone, but Kamijou didn't respond.

He stopped breathing and focused his attention, but he still couldn't hear anything.

He exchanged glances with Itsuwa who was standing next to him and slowly moved forward.

(What's happening here…?)

He felt like some unknown tension was seeping from the depths of the passageways, from the cracks in the walls, and from the other sides of the doors. It felt like the entire atmosphere of the area had been changed.

Kamijou was unable to figure out what had caused it.

This was because the answer showed itself before he had a chance to.

With a loud crash, the thick wall to Kamijou's side burst open.

A powered suit came crashing through.

It slammed into Kamijou and knocked him to the ground. The phone in his hand fell to the ground and the LCD screen shattered.

“!?”

Itsuwa hurriedly thrust the tip of her spear at the powered suit, but she stopped partway.

This was because the powered suit had its arms and legs dangling down showing that it had lost all functionality. It must have been hurled in there by someone.

A number of cylindrical objects were scattered about the powered suit. The 350-milliliter drink can-sized cylinders were the shells for the anti-barrier shotgun the powered suit used. The giant revolver shotgun was lying on the ground nearby.

“Kh…” Shaking his head, Kamijou stood up and heard footsteps.

He raised his head.

Itsuwa was wielding her spear so as to cover him.

And beyond her…

Through the destroyed wall, a magician stood holding a giant white blade.

It was Terra of the Left.

The man had destroyed the powered suit without breaking a sweat by using his “precedence” magic.

“They’ve really done it now…” He said in a slow voice with an intentional hint of irritation mixed in. “I didn’t expect for them to quiet down the chaos of the riots by creating an even greater chaos that I could get wrapped up in. It just goes to show how serious Academy City is. They felt they had to do something about *this* even if it brought them a certain amount of international criticism.”

In his left hand, the opposite of the hand holding the white guillotine, he held a rolled up piece of parchment. It was small. It was only about 15 cm long and 3 cm across. That parchment that had been sealed with wax was…

“The C-Document…” Itsuwa muttered in complete shock.

It was that powerful spiritual item that made a speaker's words thought to be "completely correct" for the Roman Catholic Church. And if Terra was holding it instead of the magicians that had actually been using it…

"This really is a pain. I could easily defeat them on my own, but they focused their attack on the magicians using this. And that will clearly have an effect on the spell. Really now, not being able to use human spells can be a real problem sometimes. Now I've had victory snatched from my grasp thanks to those mediocre magicians. It seems calling it quits here and leaving would be the best plan now."

"Do you really think we're just going to let you leave?" Kamijou said as he slowly lifted up his right hand. "You people can use the C-Document when you get back to the Vatican. Do you really think we're going to let you go knowing that?"

"But what can you do about it? Not even that Academy City unit attacking Avignon can stop me. Or do you think you're more powerful than all of them with that right hand of yours? Do you have any proof of that?"

"…"

As there were no more gunshots coming from anywhere in the Palace of the Popes, it was best to assume that all of the powered suits had been defeated by Terra.

With that much power at his disposal, Terra mockingly smiled towards Kamijou and Itsuwa.

"Although, I suppose it will be difficult to convince you if I don't do anything." He put the C-Document into his pocket with his left hand and lifted the white guillotine with his right. "Challenge me to your heart's content and then give up to your heart's content. I find it much more enjoyable that way."

Part 4

The cityscape of Avignon was being destroyed more and more.

The rioters were being knocked unconscious by the shockwave-like blanks, dragged into piles by the powered suits, and then carried away by the balloons woven with bulletproof fiber.

And among it all, Tsuchimikado Motoharu ran.

He moved from hiding behind rubble to hiding behind cars only staying out in the open for as short a time as possible. He was fleeing the pursuing powered suits. Even though he was staying behind cover as much as possible, the blasts continued. He avoided level ground as much as he could and continued along paths with toppled street lights and destroyed roads.

But…

(Tch. So they really aren’t going to fall over from just that. Their drive correction devices are working…!!)

Even though the powered suits walked on two legs which was difficult to balance and were actually quite heavy, they moved without showing any signs of wobbling. They weren’t walking one step at a time like on level ground; they were moving smoothly like a cockroach.

The powered suits scanned the environment and automatically made the most optimal corrections for the situation. They pursued Tsuchimikado while traveling as fast as an automobile and crossing the terrain more smoothly than a human could.

It was only a matter of time until checkmate.

Tsuchimikado stopped in the middle of the road. The tall buildings on the left and right were destroyed and had blocked the road like a rockslide. It wasn’t too much to climb over, but the powered suits wouldn’t give him enough time to do so. It would end with him getting shot in the back while pressing up against the wall.

He heard a metallic noise from behind him.

It sounded like a gear turning.

He felt a chill run up his spine. It was a sound he had not yet heard that signified that something had been changed.

He had a pretty good idea of what.

(…The anti-barrier shotgun.)

It was the sound of the blanks for suppressing the rioters being changed to the live shells that were intended to open the gates to nuclear shelters.

(Here it comes!!)

Tsuchimikado leapt with all his strength to the side without bothering to turn around. Directly afterwards, the sound of an explosion hit him like a physical blow. The mountain of rubble that had blocked his way was blown into nothingness. In a single blast, a hole a few meters in diameter had been created.

“…!!”

Covering his ears, Tsuchimikado looked behind him.

The powered suit pointed the gun barrel that was big enough to put a fist in towards him and placed its finger on the trigger.

The streets of Avignon were narrow.

He couldn’t jump to the side to avoid it this time.

“!? Hey, wooden sticks. Be useful for once and be a shield!! (Use the talisman of the blue wood and protect my body!!)[1]”

Tsuchimikado yelled this as he pulled out a piece of origami as the explosive gunshots came from directly in front of him.

The few dozen anti-materiel bullets fired acted as if they had ricocheted off of a shield slightly in front of Tsuchimikado and destroyed the walls they hit.

Blood leaked from between Tsuchimikado’s lips.

It was the side-effect of his magic use.

Even so, he pulled out another piece of origami, this one black.

“C’mon, wake up you fuckers. Destroy some shit and laugh your asses off about it!! (The color black is the symbol of water. Open a path similar to that violence!!)”

A sphere of water a meter across suddenly appeared out of nowhere and flew towards the powered suit knocking it back.

But that was all it did.

Since he had used magic twice in quick succession, blood was oozing from Tsuchimikado’s side. He tried to prop himself up against the ancient wall, but one of his legs gave out before his hand reached the wall.

“Fuck…”

He looked around the area and saw a number of powered suits. And there were even some on the roofs of the buildings aiming for him.

(…)

As he checked the location of the suits, Tsuchimikado slowly raised his hands above his head.

Then he moved his lips and spoke.

“I surrender. …Do whatever you like to me.”

“But,” he continued. “That’s only if you can do it.”

As soon as he spoke those words, something changed with the powered suits aiming at him.

The powered suits that could move more smoothly than a flesh-and-blood person suddenly stiffened. As the pilots hurriedly checked the behavior of the suits, the sound of stuck gears could be heard. It seemed that not even the fingers could move, because there was no sound of gunshots.

“I’m sure you want to know what’s going on.”

As Tsuchimikado slowly approached, he could feel the atmosphere of surprise coming from within the suits. These powerful weapons were still being piloted by normal people.

“Those suits are equipped with the new drive correction device installed. Whether in a desert or in the Antarctic, the machine will automatically check the environment and perform maintenance.”

“But,” Tsuchimikado said, “in certain situations that can be a hindrance. For instance, if certain special conditions are met in a certain order, it creates an error in the device. Simply put, there’s a security hole that slows down the system’s decision-making ability when it simultaneously receives multiple contradictory conditions such as ‘turn right’ and ‘turn left’. Did you forget that the HsPS-15 is a prototype that had only recently made it to the point that it could be shown at exhibition?”

In addition to that, the version of powered suit being used in Avignon was made to share its environmental data with the other suits. That meant that an error in one suit could affect all of them.

Tsuchimikado walked up next to one of the frozen powered suits and forcibly took the anti-barrier shotgun from its grip.

“…The error in the drive correction device was sent to the rest of them. Now, you need to manually change the settings on the escape equipment to even get out. There’s a lot of annoying work that needs to be done to get them up and running and it’ll take 10 minutes at the very least.” He said while carrying the huge shotgun that looked like a shortened version of a tank’s main gun over his shoulder.

It seemed the pilots inside the powered suits were completely dumbfounded at what Tsuchimikado was saying. They must have been wondering how the man in front of them knew about a problem with the suits that they didn’t even know about.

Meanwhile, Tsuchimikado tapped on the armor of the suit next to him and spoke in a bored manner.

“If you’re gonna get out, you should hurry. Once they figure out you can’t attack, the rioters are going to start attacking.”

After that, a clicking sound came from the powered suits. It seemed they were in a hurry to get out. Tsuchimikado thought as he watched this.

(Now then…)

He had succeeded in temporarily robbing the suits of functionality, but the soldiers themselves were still alive.

(This is where the true battle begins.)

At least they were sealed inside until they could repair the escape equipment. As they couldn’t fight, maybe he could actually talk with them.

(First, I need to explain that I’m acting as an agent of Academy City. No, I suppose I’m acting against the wishes of my superiors this time. I hope I can get this conversation going without making things worse.)

Tsuchimikado was planning out how he was going to “negotiate”, but his thoughts were interrupted and he suddenly looked up.

He could hear a loud roar.

He saw a jet black bomber flying through the peaceful blue sky.

And that 100-meter class bomber was not the only one. Over 10 bombers were circling in a giant arc above Avignon.

Tsuchimikado gritted his teeth at the sight of that characteristic silhouette.

(That’s the Academy City HsB-02 Supersonic Stealth Bomber!)

Those bombers were created using the same tech as the supersonic passenger plane that he and Kamijou had taken to Avignon and that could travel over 7000 kph. It was said that they could shake off a missile just by flying straight.

After his thoughts calmed down, a question came to his mind.

Where had the huge number of powered suits come from?

This was his answer.

They had been loaded onto the bombers and brought to France in about an hour. Then they parachuted down to Avignon. It was quite a feat, but Academy City's elaborate technology had made it a reality.

Naturally, the HsB-02's would have more than the suits loaded on them. They must have had the equipment required for a bombing as well.

(Damn it…) Tsuchimikado thought as he glared up into the sky. (They dropped the powered suits down first to make sure the C-Document was here. Once that's confirmed, they're just planning to use the bombers to blow up the Palace of the Popes, aren't they!?)

It was a rough and easy to understand plan, but it was hard to think it would work knowing the special spell Terra of the Left had.

Tsuchimikado banged on the armor of the powered suit next to him.

"Hey! Have the people of Avignon been evacuated yet!? When is the bombing set to happen!? Those are the new HsB-02's. They aren't planning on using *that* here, are they!?"

As he yelled, he could feel his thoughts getting mixed up as he thought frantically.

(What are you thinking, Aleister? I could understand if it was the others, but you know about the world of magic. If everything could be solved with normal military action, organizations like Necessarius wouldn't exist. Don't you know that this isn't enough to eliminate the C-Document?)

Tsuchimikado had another thought.

(Or do you still have something else up your sleeve?)

Part 5

Nine thousand meters above Avignon, a Level 5 carrying a cane was onboard one of the 11 HsB-02 Supersonic Stealth Bombers. The Level 5 and a few maintenance crew members were the only things in the large space that would normally be full of bombs.

A high-pitched alarm was sounding from the speakers inside the bomber and a staticky transmission followed. One of the maintenance crew members turned towards the Level 5 after hearing the transmission.

“Part A is complete! We can now move to Part B. The wall there will open once Part C begins. You need to get your parachute on!!”

“I don’t need one,” responded the Level 5 in an annoyed voice.

The Level 5 calmly held his cane and stared at the flat-panel monitor on the wall.

(God, this is a fucking pain. I’m pretty busy and they go and kick me out of Academy City. I need to get this shit over with and get back to the real issue at hand.)

Seen from above, Avignon was a small city surrounded by ancient stone walls. Perhaps because the area was limited by the walls, the inside looked like it was packed full of tall buildings.

Looking at that, the Level 5 laughed.

“Ha ha. It’s like a miniature Academy City.”

“Huh?”

“Nothing. But this is a damn convenient world. We can get from Academy City to France in about an hour.”

“Heh. I suppose it can be convenient.” The maintenance crew member chose his words carefully as he spoke with the Level 5. “When flying at supersonic

speeds, air resistance raises the surface temperature of the fuselage significantly. When going at full speed, it approaches 1000 degrees, so there are pipes for liquid coolant throughout the entire thing."

"Liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen?"

"Yes. The pipes full of coolants with a low freezing point pass through these tanks to increase the cooling effect. Liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen are also used as propellant for space shuttles and are part of what is used as fuel here. But that means the cooling effect is lost as we use up fuel."

"So we really are going to London instead of making a U-turn and going back. I can't believe they agreed to give us supplies for the bombers. *Japan* hasn't even given us permission to have bombers."

While the Level 5 was speaking in amazement, the alarm rang over the speakers again.

After hearing the announcement, the maintenance crew member raised his voice.

"Part B is beginning!!"

As he spoke, 4 of the bombers flying nearby changed course.

They rotated and moved 15 km away like spreading out the radius of a circle.

Then they turned their noses and accelerated away.

The bottom of the bombers had a part on them that the one the Level 5 was on did not.

It was a jet black blade about half as long as the bomber itself.

The blade was elongated like a baton and its surface was made so it could electrically contract. In 1/100 of a millimeter units, the concavity/convexity and pattern could be controlled.

That long but sensitive blade sliced through the air as the supersonic bomber flew at 7000 kph.

From that alone, the wind currents created by the blade held tremendous destructive power.

But what would happen if a small amount of iron sand was mixed in?

The answer to that would soon be displayed.

The four bombers caused the ground to be sliced in a square with Avignon trapped inside.

Only a few grams of iron sand were disseminated from the side of the blade.

Because that metal powder reached a tremendous speed higher than 10,000 kph, an orange flash cut into the ground even though it started from a few thousand meters in the air.

The bomber the Level 5 was riding on shook.

The air had been disturbed by the passage of a friendly bomber.

"…"

The Level 5 put one hand on the wall without taking his eyes away from the monitor.

The first blast had created a trench 20 meters across and 10 meters deep.

Directly afterwards, the trench melted into orange and collapsed. The earth itself was being cooked until it was like magma. And just like that, the old city of Avignon was trapped inside a river of lava. The electricity and water lines and even the Rhone River flowing near the city were severed. The outer circumference had already started to flood.

Now everyone inside the old town of Avignon was completely trapped.

The city did continue on past the outer walls and the residents in the area that was going to become a river of lava had been forcibly removed by the powered suits, but none of them were going to be very thankful.

(Ha. So this is the "Earth Blade". With only 3 kilograms of iron sand and an

hour, it could cut the entire supercontinent of Eurasia in two. Academy City certainly does make some fun things.)

Normally, bombers were protected by a few fighters.

Unlike small fighters, large bombers couldn't turn very sharply. If they did, they would immediately stall and might even succumb to inertia and come to pieces in midair. In other words, if an enemy got a lock, they had no way of avoiding the missile. Chaff or a flare could help to a certain extent, but they weren't perfect methods. Therefore, fighters would be deployed around a bomber to help prevent the enemy from making a lock.

But the HsB-02 supersonic bomber was different.

Since it could only fly straight, it was made so that it could shake off a missile just by flying straight.

Overwhelming speeds of over 7000 kph made that a reality. With air-to-air missiles fired by fighters and even surface-to-air missiles lying in wait at bombing points, the idea was to carry out the bombing and get out of range shortly after the lock was made.

The supersonic bomber changed the traditional rules of an air battle through pure power.

And when the Academy City high power stealth functionality was added in, it became next to impossible to defend against an attack from the HsB-02.

"The objective area is confirmed to be isolated!!" The maintenance crew member said loudly.

The bombers that had fired the Earth Blade went an ample 20 km away and decelerated. They must have altered the "pattern" of the blade's surface because the wind currents stopped.

"We will now switch to the aerial bombing of the entire mission area!!"

The Earth Blade gave the impression of being an overly imprecise attack, but, by electrically controlling the "pattern" on its surface, it could attack in a curve or in a single spot instead of in a straight line. It could cause destruction precise

enough it could cut out a jigsaw puzzle piece. Apparently, a single bomber could make multiple lines at once if need be.

“This bomber will be altering course to ensure the path of the 8 bombers to be used in the next bombing. Watch out for unexpected shocks!”

The next target was the area inside the old city of Avignon.

They weren’t just targeting the Palace of the Popes; they were targeting the entire old city. The powered suit unit was still down there, but the pilots were equipped with a type of transmitter that the bombers would detect and utterly burn the city of Avignon down to a sea of lava while avoiding those spots.

The plan was for the powered suits to be abandoned and melted down by the Earth Blade. The pilots would pretend to be locals and travel to the nearby coast of the Mediterranean where they would leave France in a waiting submarine. Travelling long distance in powered suits would stand out too much, so the unrecoverable equipment would just be melted down.

But for the plan to succeed, the unit on the ground would have to cross the sea of lava under their own power. They must have had some equipment to help them with that. With the city turned to lava, there would be plenty of updrafts, so perhaps they had some handheld gear that would allow them to slowly float across like dandelion seeds.

“…”

According to the monitor, there were still a lot of people who had not escaped the old city of Avignon. Those lucky enough to be near the powered suit pilots would be saved, but most of them would be killed by the 8000 degree blade.

“Change of plans.”

“Huh?”

“We’re after the Palace of the Popes, right? Focus your attack there first. If that doesn’t work, I’ll go down myself. If you don’t hear from me after that, then you can attack the entire old town as planned.”

“But…you’re only supposed to go down under Part C. The calculations say that

we should be able to eliminate the enemy forces with only Part B.”

“Change of plans,” the Level 5 repeated.

The maintenance crew member’s back stiffened. He had remembered why the Level 5 was on board the bomber.

He was a bomb.

Just like an atomic bomb or a hydrogen bomb, he was a bomb loaded on the bomber to be dropped as part of the mission.

The maintenance crew member grabbed his radio and began making a transmission. He appeared to be negotiating with his superior who had command of the operation and he repeated himself again and again. Afterwards, he put down the radio and silently looked over at the Level 5.

“…Y-your request was accepted. The plan for Part B has been changed. We will concentrate our attack on the Palace of the Popes.”

He must have been wondering why his stubborn superior had given in to this, because he had a curious look on his face.

Meanwhile, the Level 5’s lips pulled up at the sides in a smile.

“Good.”

“B-but why…?”

The Level 5 clicked his tongue in annoyance at the question.

The isolated city of Avignon and the tiny fleeing people who looked like grains of rice were displayed on the monitor.

“It may all look the same to you, but there are different kinds and different levels of evil.”

An electronic sound resounded throughout the bomber in what must have been the preparations to open the bay.

Hearing that, the Level 5 turned towards the maintenance crew member and

spoke.

“A first-class villain doesn’t target honest lives.”

Part 6

A loud roar that sounded like cold water being sprinkled on a heated iron plate amplified hundreds of times resounded throughout the Palace of the Popes.

Something must have happened outside the building, but neither Kamijou nor Itsuwa nor Terra looked to see what.

Kamijou held up his right hand and glared at Terra.

They were about 7 meters apart.

He was well within range of Terra’s flour guillotine. Not to mention that Terra had his “precedence” ability.

The condition of the floor was bad. Pieces of the stone wall Terra had broken down were scattered about and a number of cylindrical shells that belonged to the fallen powered suit were too.

“I’d ask you one last time, but I really doubt you’re just going to hand over the C-Document.”

“No. So just accept your defeat.”

Kamijou dashed forward after hearing that.

Terra responded by swinging the flour blade in his right hand.

Kamijou thrust his right hand forward as a means of defense as he ran.

But…

“Precedence: Air – Lower, Flour – Higher.”

The flour guillotine suddenly expanded with a roar.

The guillotine acted as a giant fan 3 meters wide and flew towards Kamijou bringing an enormous amount of air with it.

“!?”

Kamijou couldn’t respond.

Itsuwa had been running towards Terra along with him and she forcibly grabbed his arm. She dodged to the side dragging Kamijou with her as the air that shouldn’t have had any weight or sharpness to it smashed the floor and wall of the Palace. A number of the shells scattered on the floor exploded like fireworks. The shockwave-like noise almost made Kamijou choke.

Itsuwa gently let go of Kamijou’s arm.

And then with a speed that one would never imagine from her previous gentleness, she brought her spear up again and fiercely stabbed it towards Terra’s throat.

The sound of the air being sliced resounded.

“Precedence: Blades – Lower, Human Skin – Higher.”

With Terra’s words, Itsuwa’s attack was deflected by his skin.

A metallic clang reverberated through the Palace of the Popes.

Itsuwa felt a resounding pain in her hand like she had struck a giant stone with her spear.

But she did not stop moving.

She maintained her striking posture and kicked up some pebbles that were at her

feet towards Terra’s eyes.

Terra did not move his head out of the way. He didn’t even close his eyes.

He casually swung his right arm.

A horizontal strike flew towards the pebbles and Itsuwa and even Kamijou was knocked back from the new angle he had been attacking from.

A dull noise sounded as Kamijou and Itsuwa were knocked to the ground.

“Ow…!?”

Itsuwa tried to get up, but she grimaced.

When she had collapsed, she had fallen on the remains of the stone wall Terra had destroyed. Falling on that stone had done some damage to her ankle.

And Terra of the Left did not overlook that fact.

“Precedence: Human Flesh – Lower, Flour – Higher.”

The guillotine flew.

Itsuwa could not move with her damaged leg, so she quickly brought her spear up.

Kamijou got in between them from the side.

He held out his right hand and blew Terra’s attack to pieces.

There was a loud roar.

Terra swung his right arm again and Itsuwa pushed Kamijou to the side as she jumped in the opposite direction on her hurt leg.

Terra’s guillotine flew between them.

“Oh, how brave,” Terra smiled slightly while watching Itsuwa bear with her pain. “But you’re at your limit. Right now, you’re just getting in his way.”

Kamijou was about to fly into a rage at Terra's words, but…

"…That's true." Itsuwa spoke quietly.

But there was a smile on her lips.

"But you've finally shown your weakness. A fatal weakness."

"And what might that be?"

"It's what that Tsuchimikado-san was talking about. The weakness of your precedence spell, 'Execution of Light'. I've noticed a clear oddity in your actions…"

"Oh?" Terra said interestedly.

Itsuwa slowly pointed the tip of her spear towards Terra and spoke.

"The Amakusa Church does not use incantations and magic circles for our spells; we gather together everyday objects and habits that have magical meaning within them to create our spells. And because of this, we are quite good at finding those meanings."

"I see. That is a problem." Terra spoke with no emotion in his voice. "But do you have time to do anything with this knowledge now that you've figured out it?"

As he spoke, Terra lifted his right hand above his head.

The guillotine tapered off like a screw and stabbed into the tall ceiling.

"Precedence: Ceiling – Lower, Flour – Higher."

As Terra moved his arm like he was pulling the string for a fluorescent light, it came down.

Just like a trap in an old castle, the ceiling of that floor suddenly lowered.

The pillars supporting the ceiling sank down unnaturally into the floor.

"!!"

Itsuwa hurriedly held her spear vertically.

She wedged the spear between the falling ceiling and the floor narrowly avoiding being crushed to death.

But in doing so she lost her weapon.

Terra then mercilessly attacked with his guillotine.

There was an explosive roar.

The horizontally flying guillotine directly hit Itsuwa's defenseless body. She doubled over while a dull sound could be heard and the shock knocked her small body through the air. Her body rolled a few meters as she bounced 2 or 3 times until her body finally lost its momentum and stopped.

She lay limp and did not get up.

Her arms and legs were splayed out, but her chest was slowly rising and falling so she wasn't dead. However, it didn't look like she would regain consciousness anytime soon.

(Damn it…)

Kamijou gritted his teeth.

"Itsuwa!!"

"Well, this was to be expected. A normal magician can't hope to stand up to a member of God's Right Seat."

As Terra spoke, the fallen ceiling returned to its original height. The compressed pillars also returned to their normal length.

Itsuwa's spear that had prevented her from being crushed fell to the ground.

"You bastard…"

Kamijou slowly, very slowly put more power into his right fist.

But Terra did not seem even slightly worried by the expression on Kamijou's

face.

“My, my. Getting so mad is only going to cause more problems. This is a battle. You didn’t think I was going to let you punch me again and again without attacking back, did you?”

“…”

“In fact, I’m the one that’s disappointed here. I thought taking on the Imagine Breaker would make for a difficult battle, but I never expected it would be this incomplete. If its original functionality were recovered, you should have been able to protect that magician from that attack.”

“What?” Kamijou looked confused.

(Imagine Breaker’s…original functionality?)

Kamijou stared at his right hand without meaning to and a slight smile appeared on Terra’s lips.

“Oh. Do you not know?”

“…”

“Heh heh. But that can’t be. You would have to know. Not knowing would mean…Hm? By any chance do you not remember some things you *should* know?”

“Why you…!!”

“Oh, did I just hit the bull’s eye? It seems I’ve found some interesting research material!!”

“…!”

It may not have made much sense to get mad over that.

But talk of “not remembering” bore deep into Kamijou’s heart because he had lost his memories.

“Ha ha!!” Terra laughed loudly while watching Kamijou somehow manage to

get to his feet while wobbling. “I see! I see! I don’t remember hearing any report of that…Have you been hiding it? What for? Have you told that magician lying over there? Looking into how you lost your memories and what you’ve done about it could prove to be quite interesting.”

(Damn it!!)

Kamijou controlled his anger.

He had determined not to let anyone know he had lost his memories. All for the sake of the white girl he had met just after losing them. That was his rule. He had to follow it. Having that rule destroyed like this was about to drive him insane.

“You can tell me.” Terra of the Left spoke these nonsensical words while smiling. “You’re going to die here anyway, so you don’t have to worry about anything. I don’t know what has you so upset, but I’ll resolve it for you.”

As Terra slowly held up the flour guillotine, Kamijou gritted his teeth so hard it felt like his jaw would break.

(…The power of that blade alone isn’t fatal.) Kamijou thought while glaring at the white powder swirling around Terra. (The main problem is that “precedence”. If only I could find a weakness in that power that he uses for both offense and defense, I can take him down!! If a weakness even exists, that is.)

Tsuchimikado and Itsuwa had both determined that there was one.

Or it was possible that had just been a bluff they were making in their exchanges with Terra.

(There’s something there.)

Kamijou estimated the distance between himself and Terra.

(Come to think of it, there was something odd about Terra’s attacks. There were mistakes in our favor that I didn’t think too much about and tossed aside. Oh, right. There was…)

“Oh, you aren’t coming in to attack?” Terra said while lightly swinging his flour

guillotine. “Well, I don’t like waiting, so I’ll come for you!!”

As he spoke, he attacked with the white blade.

And when Kamijou Touma saw that, he…

Part 7

The flour blade roaring forcefully towards Kamijou did not hit his right hand.

He avoided the strike coming for his face by moving his head out of the way.

As he did so, he purposefully fell to the ground and grabbed a bento box sized piece of shattered wall from the ground.

As he stood back up, Kamijou threw the stone at Terra as a counter.

“Precedence: Stone – Lower, Human Skin – Higher,” Terra said almost as if he was singing.

The stone hit Terra on the forehead, but his expression did not change in the slightest.

Matching the timing with which the stone hit, Kamijou put his hand in his pocket. Terra stared at him grimly, but Kamijou ignored him, aimed for Terra’s eyes, and threw the object that had been in his pocket.

The flour guillotine roared.

But when Terra saw the object that had been ripped to shreds by it, he looked confused.

It was a simple wallet.

Kamijou had thrown that piece of synthetic leather that had no effect as a weapon and watched Terra's reaction.

"Now why did you do that?" Kamijou spoke these cutting words. "You easily repelled Itsuwa's spear and Tsuchimikado's magic. So why didn't you use your 'precedence' on a simple wallet?"

"…!?"

Terra swung the flour guillotine as if to keep Kamijou from speaking.

Kamijou continued doing so as he destroyed it with his right hand.

"If you think about it, some things just don't make sense."

Kamijou stepped forward as if to split the powdery remains of the guillotine.

"For instance, Itsuwa and I took a direct hit from that white blade, but we're still alive. You have no reason to hold back and you certainly don't seem like the type to let those that lose to you go. The answer to this is simple. When you hit us with that blade, it wasn't that you didn't feel the need to kill us. *You couldn't kill us even though you wanted to*."

The flour blade did not have enough intrinsic destructive power to kill a human. Its power had to be amplified using the precedence spell.

Which meant…

"Your 'precedence' isn't very adaptable. The blade's power was always decreased on the first attack after you stopped one of our attacks. In other words, your 'precedence' *can't be used on multiple targets at the same time*. When you move from one precedence to another, you have to reset each one every time. It has to be something like that."

"Heh," Terra laughed.

He once again brought up his giant blade as his expression relaxed.

“…So the weakness in the ‘Execution of Light’ that your friends spoke of was that.”

His voice was filled with relief at the solved mystery.

“You see, this is unadjusted. I was actually fairly curious about what they meant.”

The clergyman smiled.

“But,” Terra’s words returned to those of scorn, “now I know they weren’t anything to be worried about. Terra of the Left is not so naïve as to lose due to something like that!!”

The white blade flew with the sound of sliced air.

Kamijou blew it away with his right hand and chased after Terra who had back stepped away.

“Terra!!”

He yelled, but Terra was faster. He swung the flour guillotine again and spoke as it struck straight down.

“Precedence: The Floor – Lower, Flour – Higher.”

The thick stone floor was blown off and the small pieces flew towards Kamijou. The boy jumped to the side to avoid them and shouted.

“Why are you going this far!? It isn’t just us! You got everyone in the town of Avignon wrapped up in this! Is this really worth that!?”

“Ha. Most of the uproar was caused by your side, Academy City!”

Terra moved back with small hops and gathered the flour in his hand.

“This is for the Holy Kingdom, the ultimate goal of the entirety of the Christian Church.”

“What?”

“Oh? More people in Christian cultures know about this than know what the colors of a traffic light mean. But I suppose someone from a non-religious island nation in the Far East can’t be expected to know.” Terra spoke with slight boredom and disappointment. “It is the kingdom that God himself will create after the Final Judgment. Only those who have devoted themselves to their strong faith will be allowed there. It is a place of eternal salvation. Doesn’t it sound truly wonderful? That is my goal and I aim to help others who also wish to reach that place.”

Terra swung the flour guillotine and Kamijou blew it away with his right hand.

A few cylindrical shells on the ground were blown away by the wind pressure.

Terra spoke while staring at his weapon that had been turned to powder.

“But I had a thought.”

There was no wind, but the powder returned to Terra’s hand with an almost eerie amount of precision.

“Won’t people create conflicts in that Holy Kingdom? Even if God creates a perfect kingdom and only those with true faith are gathered there, will the various ‘groups’ people create really live up to His expectations?”

Kamijou ran forward as he listened.

Terra fired the guillotine to stop him.

“God will lead those who have kept their faith in the Christian Church to the Holy Kingdom. But even the Roman Catholic Church is split into innumerable factions. Even if God only provides salvation for devout Roman Catholic believers, the problems that arise from the different factions within the Roman Catholic Church will just be transferred over to the Holy Kingdom.”

Terra moved his right hand and the flour squirmed and formed a giant blade.

The white guillotine struck Kamijou’s fist.

“…No matter how perfect a kingdom God creates, it is meaningless as long as there are ugly divisions among the people inside it. If the conflicts we have now

are brought to the supposedly perfect kingdom, it will all be for naught. I wouldn't call that 'eternal salvation'."

As the flour guillotine was negated by his right hand, Kamijou listened.

Terra must have decided that falling back further would be pointless, because he moved forward.

"I wish for salvation. And I wish to bring salvation to others. Even if God's plan is perfect, we humans can ruin it all if we do not live up to His expectations! That is why I must know whether humanity will still have its current conflicts in the Holy Kingdom!! And if it will, I just have to guide everyone in the right direction before the Final Judgment!!"

"That is the very purpose of God's Right Seat!" Terra roared.

Unlike another member, Vento of the Front, he had chosen this path for the sake of the Roman Catholic Church.

He may be going as far as he was because he truly wanted to protect those who believed in the Roman Catholic Church.

But…

"…Is that really what salvation is?" Kamijou said as he grit his teeth.

The face of the woman who had taken a bullet to get him to act, Oyafune Monaka, came to Kamijou's mind.

He thought of Tsuchimikado and Itsuwa who had fought alongside him.

"It can't be the Roman Catholic Church at fault here. I can't imagine that the teachings of the church that brought up Orsola and Agnese could be that twisted. Your problem is much more basic than that. You don't know what the word 'salvation' means!"

The rioters rampaging throughout the city of Avignon.

And the powered suits that had come to suppress those riots that Terra had destroyed.

“There’s no way this god of yours could be spreading salvation to create conflicts like this! Screw that. If you’re going to come up with your own definition for salvation and be satisfied with that…”

He glared at the man in front of him.

That was the enemy.

“Then I’ll destroy that fucked-up illusion right here and now!!”

Kamijou leaped towards Terra as he yelled.

Terra moved back and brought the guillotine up with his right arm. Kamijou wasn’t going to catch up to him at this rate.

But even so he continued forward.

The sole of his foot landed on one of the shells on the ground, but he ignored it and stepped down even harder.

And he kicked something at his feet forward as hard as he could.

It was the Friuli Spear Itsuwa had dropped.

Spears weren’t easy to kick up, so it just slid across the floor. It hit the anti-barrier shotgun the powered suit had dropped and headed for Terra’s ankle with a slightly altered trajectory.

“!!”

Terra swung the guillotine down and smashed Itsuwa’s spear to the ground.

He went out of the way to use his guillotine to block an attack he could have easily avoided by lifting his foot up.

(I was right.)

Kamijou took that opportunity to get even closer to Terra.

He got right up next to Terra where he hadn’t been able to before.

(If Terra himself had a large power from the beginning, he wouldn’t need magic that switched out the order of precedence. Those reigning at the top don’t need to change anything. His intrinsic power is nothing special.)

Kamijou put all of his strength into his right fist.

(In other words,) he concluded, (Terra of the Left isn’t all that strong. Some guy who looks strong while hiding in a safety zone can’t possibly be stronger than people like me or Itsuwa who truly set foot in the battlefield!!)

After Terra knocked Itsuwa’s spear to the ground, he mumbled a “precedent” and shot the flour guillotine in return, but Kamijou destroyed the attack with his right fist.

“Too slow!!”

His fist continued on and struck Terra’s face.

A thick sound rang out.

Kamijou felt a dull recoil go from his tightly gripped fist to his wrist.

Because he had put all his weight into the blow, his body pitched forward.

(Got him!!)

He was sure of it.

But Terra did not collapse.

“You damn pagan aaaaaaape!!”

Strength returned to the God’s Right Seat member along with the rage.

The bottom of his shoes slid across the floor. Terra almost fell when his legs hit the collapsed powered suit. He lost his balance and bent over backwards, but his fighting spirit was not broken. Terra swung his right hand while still in that unstable posture and the flour guillotine flew fiercely towards Kamijou’s gut.

“Precedence: Human Body – Lower, Flour – Higher!!”

The blade was set to cut right through people.

And Kamijou had only just thrown his punch to Terra’s face.

It was a difficult position to touch the guillotine with his right hand from. Same for dodging out of the way.

(…!!)

Kamijou quickly trampled the objects at his feet.

All that was there was the thick anti-barrier shotgun from the powered suit Terra had defeated.

The shotgun was lying diagonally slanted due to the rubble on the ground, so it moved like a see-saw when Kamijou stepped on it. The mass of metal stood up in front of him.

“You’re too naïve!!”

But Terra’s expression did not change.

The anti-barrier shotgun was heavy, so Kamijou couldn’t pick it up easily. And even if he could grab the giant gun, it would take several seconds before he could aim it at Terra and pull the trigger. His last-ditch plan wasn’t going to work. As Kamijou desperately tried to grab the shotgun, it was slammed forcefully into his gut by Terra’s guillotine.

A tremendous noise resounded through the Palace of the Popes.

Red blood flew through the air.

The liquid was dripping from Kamijou’s mouth as he doubled over. He hadn’t been able to block the attack with his right hand. He hadn’t been able to dodge out of the way. He had been hit by the attack as it came directly for his gut and strength fled his body.

“Wha-…?” came the shocked voice.

But it was Terra of the Left’s voice, not Kamijou’s.

But you couldn’t blame him.

He had amplified the destructive power of the guillotine with his precedence magic and yet *Kamijou’s body had not been sliced in two*.

“…”

Kamijou smirked and used his right hand to grab the guillotine that had struck

him in the gut.

And with that the flour blade came apart.

Terra of the Left started to move back, but Kamijou moved forward before he could.

He was now in range of Kamijou's fist.

"What kind of result was that? Imagine Breaker is supposed to only be in your right hand. What happened? Don't tell me a pagan ape like you has already achieved that power!!"

"That wasn't it."

Kamijou tightly clenched his right fist.

"That had nothing to do with Imagine Breaker."

"Then wha-…!?"

Kamijou moved before Terra could finish yelling.

He aimed directly for Terra of the Left's face that was currently colored with shock.

"Do you really think I'm going to answer?"

A thick sound rang out.

This time, Terra's body was thrown to the ground.

Part 8

“Gh…”

Kamijou held his stomach that was throbbing with pain, gathered strength in his staggering legs, and just barely managed to stay standing.

His gut hadn’t been sliced where the guillotine had hit, but a dark bruise was still forming.

(It looks like…I made it.)

He looked at the anti-barrier shotgun that had been bent by the shock and Itsuwa’s spear and finally breathed a sigh of relief.

When Terra had fired his guillotine for the last time, he was aiming at Kamijou, so he used his magic to give the guillotine precedence over Kamijou’s body. If it had directly hit Kamijou, it would have sliced right through him.

He was still alive thanks to the powered suit’s anti-barrier shotgun that he had kicked up right before he was hit.

Terra’s “precedence” was indeed powerful, but it could only change one precedence at a time. To change from one to another, the previous setting had to be reset each time.

In other words, when the guillotine had precedence over Kamijou’s body, it did not have precedence over other objects. So the guillotine could be stopped by putting some other object between him and the guillotine. Already soft things like the air or a wallet wouldn’t work, but the shotgun was metal.

The guillotine’s intrinsic power was not enough to crush internal organs. If something strong enough was used as a shield, it wasn’t hard to defend against the attack.

One problem was what exactly counted as “Kamijou’s body”. His clothes and things he was carrying were a bit of a gray area, but something that wasn’t even his like the shotgun wouldn’t be counted as part of his body.

Itsuwa’s spear that Kamijou had kicked just before was an object belonging to someone else just like the shotgun. That was why Terra had been unable to slice

Kamijou in half along with the spear. If the spear had been something that Kamijou normally carried around, he probably would have been able to.

Kamijou had realized Terra's weakness because of that spear. Without it, he would probably be in two pieces right now.

"…"

Kamijou looked over at Terra who was lying on the floor.

The large amount of flour hadn't kept its blade form and was now scattered about him.

(It looks like it's over… Is Itsuwa okay? Tsuchimikado is…Well, he might still be fighting the powered suits…)

Kamijou looked at the flour that had lost its magical effect and was being blown away by the wind.

He was in pain, but he still breathed a sigh of relief.

He looked at Terra's face again.

Something cylindrical had fallen out of Terra's pocket. The rolled up old piece of parchment was the powerful spiritual item known as the Document of Constantine or the C-Document for short.

Kamijou bent down and grabbed it with his right hand.

Actually, it crumbled before he could grab it.

As soon as his fingertips touched the C-Document, the parchment fell to pieces like the end of a cigarette being tapped on an ash tray. It lost its form becoming dust and was gently blown away by the wind.

It happened much too quickly.

It made all the uproar seem almost pointless.

Kamijou turned his attention from the destroyed C-Document and thought about the enemy he had been fighting.

(…Terra.)

He looked down at the unconscious man.

This was not Academy City. Now that the battle was over, he couldn't just leave it all to Anti-Skill. He couldn't relax until he had restrained Terra and taken him to the proper place.

(Come to think of it, is Tsuchimikado all right? I guess I should contact him and discuss with the Anglican Church what to do. I have the feeling Academy City's influence here is pretty weak…)

The powered suits that had attacked Avignon were from Academy City, but oddly enough Kamijou never thought of consulting them on this. Perhaps his first impression of them was too horrible.

Kamijou looked around the area.

Itsuwa was lying a bit away.

He approached her, grabbed her slender shoulders, and shook her, but she showed no sign of waking. There was only the regular sound of breathing coming from her lips as her chest slightly rose and fell.

"Oh, right. Her spear…"

Kamijou went to go get the spear he had kicked and went back to Itsuwa.

He placed the dangerous weapon next to her.

"Thanks, Itsuwa. If you hadn't been here, I probably wouldn't have won." Kamijou softly said while looking at the girl's closed eyes.

Since she had been knocked out, she wouldn't have heard the discussion between Kamijou and Terra about Kamijou's lost memories. But he couldn't exactly say he was "glad" about that. After all, Itsuwa had fought alongside him without knowing about it.

"…"

There was nothing but bitter things in his heart.

But he shook them aside and thought.

(I need to talk with Tsuchimikado…)

He was going to call Tsuchimikado on his phone, but it wasn't in his pocket. He looked around and found what looked like it on the ground a bit away.

But when he picked it up, the LCD screen was broken so he couldn't see and some part was catching so it wouldn't close.

"Damn it," he swore and then he heard a noise from behind him.

"!!"

He hurriedly turned around, but Terra was still lying on the floor as before. Only the position of his arm was slightly changed. He must have tried to get up but couldn't muster the strength.

"Ha ha. I see. The Imagine Breaker is indeed difficult for us to deal with. It negates every little thing and it even feels like it negates our efforts as well."

Terra's trembling lips moved slowly as he lay on the floor glaring in annoyance at Kamijou.

"…Are you not going to ask?"

"About what?"

"About Imagine Breaker."

Kamijou stopped moving when he heard that unexpected answer.

Imagine Breaker.

He just used that power as if it were normal and never really questioned it. And it seemed Terra knew something about it. That meant it must be something from the magic side and not the science side. But Index didn't seem to know anything about it despite having 103,000 grimoires memorized.

Kamijou thought for a short time.

“Do you know what it is?”

“Heh heh.” Terra of the Left laughed cruelly at Kamijou’s words. “If you have to ask, I suppose you truly have lost your memories.”

“…”

“Heh heh. You need to think about why Imagine Breaker has a connection to your ‘right hand’. There is a great answer hidden there. There is also meaning behind the fact that it can negate all magic…”

Terra smiled in enjoyment as he watched Kamijou.

“It’s quite simple,” he said.

The light sound of Terra breathing sounded greatly amplified in Kamijou’s ears.

Terra slowly moved his lips.

“The true identity of Imagine Breaker is-…”

Kamijou was not able to hear the rest of the sentence.

This was because there was a tremendous noise and Terra of the Left’s body suddenly exploded.

No, technically Kamijou did not see the instant Terra was blown away.

An orange flash came down through the ceiling right above Terra. The pillar of light was about 3 meters across and, the second it hit the floor, a terrible blast roared through that room of the Palace of the Popes. Kamijou’s feet were torn from the ground in an instant and he flew several meters back like a puff of dust. Itsuwa and the powered suit were caught up by the blast too and flew back with him.

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!?” Kamijou screamed when he hit the floor.

It wasn’t so much a sharp pain as it was a weak scorching pain in his arm. It felt like a day old sunburn. When he looked at it, his skin was slightly red. He had

been burned.

(Wh-what just…?)

He shook his hazy head and looked at the area that had exploded.

When he did, his body stiffened.

The area Terra had been lying in had become a swirl of lava. A few meters of the stone floor had been turned to a glowing orange pond and what looked like the same stuff was dripping from the huge hole in the ceiling. He heard the sound of evaporating water. When he tried to approach, an invisible wall of heat hit his skin.

He could see something out the window.

Those objects that looked like they were created from dark stains that were circling in the blue sky were…bombers.

Where they would normally have bay doors to drop bombs, they had a jet black metal blade.

He didn't know what had happened, but it was clear it was some type of attack.

"Terra…"

As he could not approach due to the heat, Kamijou called the name of his enemy.

The steel wings flying in the air were coming back his way.

The bombers had created enough distance for their approach and were accelerating to a tremendous speed.

"Terraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!"

His yell was erased.

Multiple pillars of light tore through the ceiling and hit the exact point Terra had been in. With that kind of accuracy, it was more sniping than it was bombing. The orange light took away Kamijou's vision. His body was thrown against the floor again and again from some kind of after-effect.

He passed out.

But even if he hadn’t passed out, he wouldn’t have been able to find Terra.

The ceiling and walls disappeared in an area in front of Kamijou as it all turned into a sea of lava. A third of the Palace of the Popes disappeared in the same way.

And Terra was gone without having left a corpse.

Notes

1. ↑ Tsuchimikado's spells are always given with a proper descriptive phrase that is in parentheses here in the translation and a crude phrase given in furigana in the original which is what he actually says.

Epilogue: That Answer Leads to the Next Mystery. *Question.*

That shock woke Itsuwa up.

She was in the Palace of the Popes. Right before she had passed out, she had been collapsed in the center of the floor…or so she had thought. Now she was right next to the wall. Her spear was next to her.

She still had some damage left so she was sluggish and found it difficult to move.

She sluggishly grabbed her spear.

She felt hot.

And then she realized why.

A few meters in front of her, the stone walls, floor, and ceiling had melted into a thick orange viscous liquid. She heard what sounded like water being sprinkled on a heated metal plate and most of her vision was obscured by white steam.

“What…happened…?”

She looked around.

A bit away from her a powered suit lay unmoving. Next to it, the Imagine Breaker boy was lying face up. He didn’t look like he was conscious. When she got near him, she saw that his skin was tinged red. It wasn’t from the light; he had been lightly burned.

It wasn’t enough to leave a scar.

It would have been nice if she could have put some ice on it, but she didn’t have

any and wasn’t very good at ice magic. She searched through her pockets, pulled out a wet towel, and gently pressed it against his arm. The wound seemed superficial and she breathed a sigh of relief.

(Where is Terra of the Left…?) Itsuwa idly thought while administering first aid. (And the C-Document? Did Terra cause all this? But this is such a different type of phenomenon from what he did before…)

Had they won or lost?

She didn’t even know that.

From what she could tell, the Imagine Breaker boy’s wounds were superficial. She decided to wait for him to come to and ask him what happened. And if necessary they would chase after Terra.

“…”

She hadn’t been able to stay in the battle with Terra to the end.

She had lost consciousness partway through and left it all to an amateur.

Itsuwa gritted her teeth at her own powerlessness.

(I have to do something…) she thought.

But the crisis did not even give her that much time.

“Tch. This has turned into a real pain in the ass.”

Tension spread through Itsuwa’s body when she heard that sudden voice.

The voice itself was quite sinister sounding, but what surprised her the most was what direction it came from.

Itsuwa brought her spear to the ready and turned her eyes to look at something she couldn’t believe.

It came from in front of her.

It came from the passageway that had been turned to lava.

She was sure she had heard the voice come from that direction.

Due to the enveloping steam, she couldn’t make out the details of the figure.

But from the silhouette she could see, she could tell the figure was standing in a completely normal and natural way.

Even though he was standing in lava that must have been a few thousand degrees.

Even the enveloping steam was more than 100 degrees and he was in the middle of it all.

“Someone needs to tell those assholes there’s such a thing as *too much* force. Using a blade for severing continents on a flesh-and-blood human is just wrong. I mean, how am I supposed to confirm the remains? Well, since the riots stopped after the blast, I guess the objective was carried out.”

The figure did not seem to care about her.

He didn’t even look her way.

His words weren’t directed towards her either. He must have been using a radio or a cell phone to talk with someone far away.

(That’s fine,) Itsuwa thought.

She could tell an odd sweat was coming from her hands as they held the spear.

She didn’t know how she could tell, but that figure standing in the middle of the lava was on a different level. He was past the level where you thought about how to take him on or that you might win if a miracle occurred. She felt that facing him would be like swinging her slender spear towards a gigantic piece of iron.

He spoke.

And all the while Itsuwa and her blade never even entered his field of vision.

“I’ll check the area for the body, but if I haven’t found it in 10 minutes I’m outta here. You can just check over the area after it cools for a hair or bloodstain to run

a DNA test on or something. Ah? You want me to retrieve the nonfunctioning powered suits? Get someone else to do that. There’re organizations and agencies that work with Academy City in France, right?”

He stopped speaking there.

His conversation with whoever it was must have been over.

“…”

Itsuwa held her breath like an herbivore hiding in a thicket waiting for a predator to go by.

He never once looked her way.

Even so, Itsuwa’s body was wrapped in fear.

It was unfathomable.

The figure ignored Itsuwa as she held her spear in trembling hands and turned completely away from her. He seemed to be headed further into the Palace of the Popes. He disappeared into the pathway of lava.

Itsuwa did not go after him.

She couldn’t even call out.

After the mysterious figure disappeared, she was too nervous to move for a short while.

In the interrogation room of the Tower of London, Stiyl Magnus and Agnese Sanctis listened to Lidvia Lorenzetti. Biagio Busoni sitting next to her seemed intent on remaining uncooperative to the end. He hadn’t opened his mouth to say a single word.

“In the Christian Church, God does not appear to man after the death of the Son of God,” Lidvia’s voice rang out in the small interrogation room. “But in exchange, his angels start appearing before people more frequently. The story goes that the angels and the demons once had a great war. And since it was to the point that a certain theologian felt the need to divide them into 9 groups, there must be quite a large number of them.”

“Where are you going with this?” Stiyl cut in, but Lidvia merely continued.

“God’s Right Seat is a practical organization. If he does not appear before people, does God really exist? Or is God merely pretending to be an angel and still making contact with us? God’s Right Seat asks that kind of question and thus chases after the presence of ‘someone mixed in with the angels’.”

In non-Christian legends, there are many stories of gods appearing on the earth in the form of humans or even creatures lower than humans.

(Maybe they got the idea from those kinds of stories,) Stiyl thought in the corner of his mind and spoke.

“What does this have to do with the name ‘God’s Right Seat’? You said that that was both the name of the organization and their final objective.”

“Humans cannot become gods,” Lidvia continued instead of directly answering his question. “There are plenty of hypotheses about such a spell existing, but I have never heard of such a thing being accomplished. However, for a step lower – that is angels – alchemists and some scholars have reported examples of such an evolution. …Of course, those examples are extremely rare.”

“In other words,” Lidvia informed them, “they want a method to become angels on top of eliminating the original sin that humans are bound by. And they do not want to become a normal angel. They are modeling it off of the one who appears on the earth in the form of an angel who is not an angel. Namely, God.”

That was the arrogant will that not only wanted to use the power of God, but to take that power as its own.

Not to mention that there was no evidence that God actually did descend mixed among the angels.

Stiyl bent his lips in a smile.

“…That’s quite the heretical sect.”

“Currently, they are aiming for Michael, the being with the highest-level power who was created to oppose Lucifer.”

Lidvia’s voice was uniform.

“Lucifer is the only being that has ever been allowed to sit to the right side of God. And Michael, who defeated Lucifer and became the ruler of all the angels, is a higher being than Lucifer, who was once his equal. Or so God’s Right Seat believes.”

The right side.

In the Christian Church, that position indicated equivalency. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, used the word “right” when honoring god to indicate that the Son of God was an equivalent existence to God.

He used the word “right” in that way because, according to the concept of the trinity, God and the Son of God were honored as equal.

But what about an angel?

Why was Lucifer able to sit to the right side of God? And did Michael really have such enormous power that he could defeat an archangel that sat to the right side of God?

Since God was a unique being and was the greatest being in the world, there should be no one sitting in that “equivalent” right seat. Not to mention that it was hard to think that God would give that seat to one of the angels he had created as a tool and a servant.

They must have been thinking that there was some special meaning in the fact that an angel, a lower being, was given that seat even so.

“The group was created with the goal of sitting in God’s Right Seat. And they believe that once they are in the Right Seat they will be able to use that power to evolve into an existence different again from an angel.”

The name of that existence was…

“La persona superiore a Dio.”

Both Stiyl and Agnese frowned upon hearing those words.

In other words…

“The One Above God[1]. That is what I hear it is called.”

Footsteps could be heard in the Vatican’s St. Peter’s Basilica.

The spacing between steps was completely even, but very calm and slow. The slow rhythm indicated the state of mind of the person walking.

The footsteps suddenly stopped.

A figure had appeared before the person walking.

“Terra.”

“Oh, it’s you Acqua…” said the person who had been walking, Terra of the Left, as he glared at Acqua of the Back who had appeared before him.

His words felt like those of someone annoyed by having their thoughts cut off by the beginning of the conversation.

The supersonic bombers that had attacked Terra at the Palace of the Popes had been powerful, but to Terra it had all been one kind of attack and therefore easy to defend against with his “precedence”. It was only multiple attacks at once that he feared.

“It looks like you lost the C-Document.”

“Yeah,” Terra responded simply to Acqua’s words. “They used that Imagine Breaker which made recovery difficult.”

“You seem to be in quite a good mood considering what happened.”

“Ha ha. Acqua, that’s not all I have to tell you.”

Terra smiled slightly as he spoke.

“The Russian Orthodox Church has officially agreed to join with us.”

Acqua remained silent for a bit.

He finally opened his mouth to speak.

“We are believers in the Roman Catholic Church. We do not celebrate having another denomination working with us.”

“Heh heh. We’re just using them. And I’m sure they know it, too.”

Terra’s expression remained calm.

He hadn’t given in yet.

“In this C-Document incident, Academy City and the Anglican Church worked together in secret. Well, I’m sure neither side would admit to it though.”

“Ah, and what mattered was whether the Russian Orthodox Church knew about it.”

“There was already some kind of connection between Academy City and the Anglican Church. And if the Russian Orthodox Church came as a newcomer asking for cooperation, they might not be treated too kindly. And since they want to benefit from this war, they must be thinking that things won’t be too good for them if the science side wins.”

Currently, the power balance between Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church was very close.

The side chosen by third powers like the Anglican Church and the Russian Orthodox Church was very important.

They had wanted to get both the Anglican Church and the Russian Orthodox Church on the magic side if possible, but the Anglican Church already had connections with Academy City.

And looking at the incident with The Book of the Law and Orsola and the incident with the Daihaseisai and the Croce di Pietro it was clear that there was a deep ditch between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church.

So they had decided to give up on the Anglicans.

In order to prevent the worst possible situation – both the Anglican Church and

the Russian Orthodox Church joining the science side – from occurring, they had needed to bring the Russians over to their side.

That was what the C-Document had been for.

Losing that spiritual item was a great loss, but they had accomplished their original objective.

“Now then. The line is now drawn between the Roman/Russian side and the Academy City/Anglican side. Well, I suppose Academy City and the Anglican Church are actually on different ‘sides’ in a broader sense, so their alliance could end up coming apart at the seams. And with Russia on our side, we have a stronger foothold to invade Japan from. Now I suppose you could say we can bring our blade to their throat. Perhaps we should discuss how to move our troops from here on with Fiamma of the Right. I actually wanted to have more time to watch how Academy City responds to things and to observe Imagine Breaker, but I suppose it doesn’t matter.”

“I see. But I have something to discuss with you first.”

Acqua’s voice was grave.

Terra responded cheerfully.

“What is it?”

“Oh, it’s a simple matter. I have received information about you *using* children and sightseers on the outskirts of Rome to make some alignment adjustments for your special spell 'Execution of Light'. Is this true?”

“Yes, it is.” Terra admitted to it surprisingly easily.

And he continued.

“Is that really something worth bringing up?”

Terra of the Left left it at that.

Acqua’s eyes narrowed.

“…Were you not acting in order to save all of humanity without discrimination? Were you not acting in order to find out if the problems caused by the factions people create would continue in the Holy Kingdom?”

“Well, yes.” Terra responded with the expression of someone who had been asked a stupid question. “It’s true that I plan to save all of humanity without discrimination. But pagans are not even human. Acqua, have you checked over the documentation? I made sure that the targets for my alignment adjustments were not believers in the Roman Catholic Church.”

“…”

“Oh, are you worried about the story from Spain about the brutal criminals who weren’t able to be executed? I’ll tell you now that I had nothing to do with that. They were believers in the Roman Catholic denomination of the Christian Church, and therefore were those who I should save. My subordinates have a habit of bringing me criminals, but they shouldn’t be doing that. The targets I use can’t be Roman Catholic.”

To Terra of the Left that was “without discrimination”.

He said he was saving all of humanity, but his definition of who was “human” was quite restrictive. He felt that those that did not fit his definition of “human” could just be treated like animals. The clergyman was stained with that thinking to the very core.

Acqua of the Back remained silent and Terra continued in annoyance.

“Once they are sent to purgatory, the sin covering their souls will be washed away and they will be given the path to the Holy Kingdom. I am merely acting as a member of the clergy and sending them on the first step by having them surrender their lives. And those who can never go to the Holy Kingdom will not even go to purgatory. They will suffer eternally in hell.”

“..I see.” Acqua gave a short reply. “So you have been performing maintenance on that spell ever since you started using it.”

“C’mon, enough with this subject, Acqua. I have a lot to do. I have to think about how to carry out the next attack on the science side. I’ve found a point needing improvement…or rather, an idiosyncrasy in my precedence magic

'Execution of Light'. It looks like I need to make some slight adjustments."

"No, there is something you need to do before that."

Terra did not even have time to make an exclamation of surprise.

With a tremendous noise, Terra of the Left's body was truly smashed to pieces.

What Acqua of the Back had done was quite simple.

He had broken one of the pillars holding up the ceiling of St. Peter's Basilica and swung it into Terra's body with a single hand. But the overwhelming power and speed with which he had done so caused what looked like a roaring billow of wind.

Terra of the Left's miraculous precedence magic "Execution of Light" had allowed him to survive Academy City's large scale supersonic bombing, but Acqua of the Back did not give him time to use it.

A splattering sound could be heard.

Most of Terra's body was gone. All that was left was his upper chest, his right arm, and his head.

"Oh…ah…?"

Terra looked up with the expression of someone who had no idea what had happened.

It seemed he tried to use "Execution of Light" to close up his wounds, but his head failed to activate the spell so nothing happened.

Acqua of the Back looked down at him in contempt.

Terra was still able to think.

But that wasn't due to anything Terra had done; it was due to Acqua's attack being so fast that his body had not yet had time to die.

"Fh…ha…"

Terra made noises but was unable to speak or breathe.

Acqua frowned.

Terra had been smashed to pieces, but he showed no fear of death.

His expression remained calm.

“…What is it, Terra of the Left?” Acqua asked, but he realized the answer before waiting for an answer.

The Holy Kingdom.

To Terra, death was only the process by which one found true salvation. Even if he died here, in the end he would be chosen by God in the Final Judgment and led to the Holy Kingdom. And thus Terra would be saved.

(He is an amazing man in his own way.)

He intended to be a pious lamb who kept the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church even now.

Acqua sighed as he thought about all this.

“Just so you know, there is no way you will be chosen by God. I never thought you would remain deluded at this stage. Do you really think you belong anywhere but hell?”

As Acqua looked at him with a face full of scorn, Terra’s calm vanished.

It was replaced by rage.

But Acqua did not properly continue the conversation. He merely spoke in a purely businesslike manner.

“God knows all. You can ask Him for the details at the Final Judgment.”

As time went on, the mass of flesh died and Terra truly became nothing more than a stain on the floor. Only then did Acqua turn his gaze away.

And once he did, a new figure appeared from behind one of the pillars.

It was an old man with a bent back – the Roman Pope.

He looked at both the human flesh on the floor and the pillar that Acqua had set on the floor.

“This is St. Peter’s Basilica. I would prefer that you did not destroy it like this.”

“I apologize.”

Acqua obediently lowered his head to these words of criticism.

“Thinking of the historical and academic value of this place, I should have avoided having a fight here. I damaged a wonderful building.”

“…This is also the greatest Roman Catholic stronghold. If you destroy it so readily, you will run into problems with its defensive functionality.”

“Hm…” Acqua thought for a second.

Eventually, he spoke.

“This is a problem we run into everywhere, not just in St. Peter’s Basilica. Take God’s Right Seat for instance. Even with such a great organization and even though the most skilled members are gathered, if we go out of control even for an instant, anything and everything will be destroyed. Just like Terra was here.”

“…”

“You hope that when God’s Right Seat achieves its goal and becomes 'The One Above God' it will directly save even more believers. I admire that goal, but that is not enough.”

Acqua stared directly into the Roman Pope’s face.

“In order for God’s Right Seat to continue functioning as it should, it needs someone outside of it to watch over it and to guide it. And I think that you are the most suitable for that position.”

Hearing those words, the Roman Pope smiled slightly.

“When I first heard about God’s Right Seat, I was overjoyed that there was such

a quick way of guiding believers," he said as he smiled. "But God does not wish for an easy path to salvation. It seems my Father watching over me truly does like his trials and tribulations."

When the Roman Pope stopped speaking, Acqua nodded.

"What will your next move be?"

"Vento cannot move. Terra was purged. That leaves only one option."

"Are you going to attack Japan via Russia as Terra suggested?"

"I realized something during all this. Civilians should not stand on the battlefield. Only soldiers need to cross swords."

It seemed that statement was implying that he would be making a move himself.

The Roman Pope mumbled to himself as he recalled Acqua of the Back's special characteristic.

"…So the man who is both a member of God's Right Seat and has the disposition of a Saint will act."

Misaka Mikoto sat stiffly while holding her cell phone.

She hadn't been able to move since she had heard the staticky words that had come from the speaker.

She could feel a cold sweat over her entire body.

Kamijou had no way of knowing, but, even though his cell phone's LCD screen had shattered and its joint had broken so it couldn't be closed, it hadn't lost its call functionality. In other words, the conversation between him and Terra in the Palace of the Popes had reached Mikoto's ear through the phone.

She had not understood most of what they had said.

No, even if she had understood it, she had forgotten most of it.

What had caused this tightening in her chest was one simple statement.

“…”

She realized that no sound came out when she tried to speak.

She moved her shaking hands and managed to turn off her cell phone. She merely stared at the phone that no longer had a connection. She thought about staying like that until her body stopped shaking, but it didn’t seem like it would ever stop.

As she slowly came out of her shocked state bit by bit, she managed to move her lips. She hadn’t intended to speak, but she could tell that the eerily hoarse voice had come from her own mouth.

She spoke very quietly.

“…He…doesn’t remember…?”

After saying the words, Misaka Mikoto thought again about what they meant.

(He lost his memories?)

Notes

1. ↑ "The One Above God" is pronounced "Kamijou", but is spelled differently from Touma's family name.

Afterword

To those who have bought the books one at a time: Welcome back.

To those that have bought them all at once: Welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

Now then, a lot happened in Volume 14. A lot of problems that haven't really been touched on yet in the series because I guess you could say I've been holding back on using them showed up here.

The overall theme was "groups". I guess the occult keyword was something like the "Final Judgment". Some things dealt directly with it while others were indirectly related. (Some easy to understand ones were Original Sin and the Mass.)

…Actually, I get the feeling that pretty much anything in the Christian Church is related to the Final Judgment. But I guess this time around it was "a little closer to the surface" than usual.

If I have to choose one side or the other, this was a magic side story, but since a lot of Academy City's new weapons showed up I think I made it so those of you who like the science side could relax too.

Many thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and the one in charge of the project Miki-san. There were a lot of things for you to complain about, so I truly thank you for sticking with it. And this time I would like to thank Manaka Junichi-san. His lectures on the workings of stealth fighters and the field of the military in general were very helpful. And I would like to thank Fukushima Yuuko-san. Her supervision of the Italian was a huge help.

Now, to you, the reader. Including the SS, there are now 15 books in the series. It is all thank to you that I've come this far. Please keep reading in the future.

And now you will be closing the pages.

I pray that you will open the pages of the next book.

And I will lay my pen down for now.

Now, what is the difference between “” and “”…? [1]

-Kamachi Kazuma

Notes

1. ↑ "" and "" are both pronounced "kamijou". The first means "The One Above God" and the second means "The One who Purifies God".

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 14

Author: **Kamachi Kazuma**

Illustrator: **Haimura Kiyotaka**

Translated by **Js06** & **Joay**

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Prologue  - Joay — Completed
Chapter 1 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 2 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 3 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 4 - Js06 — Completed
Epilogue  - Js06 — Completed
Afterword - Js06 — Completed
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